

# Knowledge and Religion in Early Modern Europe

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# Knowledge and Religion in Early Modern Europe

Studies in Honor of Michael Heyd

*Edited by*

Asaph Ben-Tov  
Yaacov Deutsch  
Tamar Herzig



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## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	ix
Note on Contributors .....	xi
Introduction .....	1
<i>Tamar Herzig</i>	

### PART ONE

#### RELIGION AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE AGE OF THE REFORMATION

<i>Eruditio Ancilla Reformationis</i> : Theodore Beza and the Uses of History in the <i>Icones</i> .....	13
<i>Myriam Yardeni</i>	
General Confession and Self-Knowledge in Early Modern Catholicism .....	25
<i>Moshe Sluhovsky</i>	

### PART TWO

#### MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

Imagination, Passions, and the Production of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: From Lipsius to Descartes .....	49
<i>Raz Chen-Morris</i>	
Love for All: The Medical Discussion of Lovesickness in Jacob Zahalon's <i>The Treasure of Life</i> ( <i>Otzar ha-Hayyim</i> ) .....	87
<i>Michal Altbauer-Rudnik</i>	

## PART THREE

## KNOWLEDGE OF NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

Religious Rituals and Ethnographic Knowledge: Sixteenth-Century Descriptions of Circumcision .....	119
<i>Yaacov Deutsch</i>	
Islam, Eastern Christianity, and Superstition according to Some Early Modern English Observers .....	135
<i>Zur Shalev</i>	
Pagan Gods in Late Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century German Universities: A Sketch .....	153
<i>Asaph Ben-Tov</i>	

## PART FOUR

## ENLIGHTENMENT AND COUNTER-ENLIGHTENMENT

Between Representation and Impersonation: Rousseau on Theatre and Politics .....	181
<i>David Heyd</i>	
The Invention of the Counter-Enlightenment: The Case for the Defense .....	205
<i>Joseph Mali</i>	
Afterword: The Changing Contours of Early Modern Intellectual History .....	229
<i>Theodore K. Rabb</i>	
Michael Heyd: Selected Bibliography .....	235



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Asaph Ben-Tov  
Yaacov Deutsch  
Tamar Herzig



## NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS

MICHAL ALTBAUER-RUDNIK, Ph.D. (2011) in History, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is Hanadiv Postdoctoral Fellow in European History. She has published several articles on the social context of early modern lovesickness, focusing on French and English society as well as on Italian Jewish communities.

ASAPH BEN-TOV, Ph.D. (2007) in History, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is the author of *Lutheran Humanists and Greek Antiquity: Melanchthonian Scholarship between Universal History and Pedagogy* (Brill, 2009). He is currently working on the role of Classics and Oriental Studies at German universities of the Early Enlightenment.

RAZ CHEN-MORRIS, Ph.D. (2001) in History of Science, Tel Aviv University, is Senior Lecturer in the Science, Technology, and Society Program at Bar Ilan University. Among his publications are numerous articles on medieval and early modern science, especially optics. He is coeditor (with Ofer Gal) of *Science in the Age of Baroque* (Springer, 2012).

YAACOV DEUTSCH, Ph.D. (2005) in History, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is Head of the History Department at David Yellin College and Executive Director of the World Union of Jewish Studies. He is the author of *Judaism in Christian Eyes: Ethnographic Descriptions of Jews and Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

TAMAR HERZIG, Ph.D. (2005) in History, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is Senior Lecturer in the History Department at Tel Aviv University. Her works on early modern European religious and gender history include *Savonarola's Women: Visions and Reform in Renaissance Italy* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

DAVID HEYD, D. Phil. (1976), Oxford University, is the Chaim Perelman Professor of Philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has written books on supererogation, justice to future generations, bioethics and toleration.

JOSEPH MALI, Ph.D. (1984) in History, Tel Aviv University, is Professor of History at Tel Aviv University. His publications include *The Rehabilitation of Myth: Vico's New Science* (Cambridge, 1992); *Mythistory* (Chicago, 2003); and *The Legacy of Vico in Modern Cultural History: From Jules Michelet to Isaiah Berlin* (Cambridge, 2012).

THEODORE K. RABB, Ph.D. (1961), is Professor (emeritus) of History at Princeton University. Among his books are *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe* (1975), *The Last Days of the Renaissance* (2006), and *The Artist and the Warrior* (2011).

ZUR SHALEV, Ph.D. (2004) in History, Princeton University, researches and teaches early modern European history at the University of Haifa. He has published works on geography, cartography, travel, pilgrimage, Hebraism, and Orientalism, including *Sacred Words and Worlds: Geography, Religion, and Scholarship, 1550–1700* (Brill, 2011).

MOSHE SLUHOVSKY, Ph.D. (1992) in History, Princeton University, is Associate Professor of History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Among his works on early modern European religious history are *Patroness of Paris: Rituals of Devotion in Early Modern France* (Brill, 1998), and *"Believe Not Every Spirit": Possession, Mysticism, and Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).

MYRIAM YARDENI, Ph.D. (1963) in History, Sorbonne, is Professor (emerita) of History at the University of Haifa. She has published many books and articles dealing with early modern France, the Huguenots, utopias, Antisemitism and historiography, and has been awarded the Israel and E.M.E.T. prizes in History.

## INTRODUCTION

Tamar Herzig

The relations between various types of secular knowledge and religious faith were a major concern for European intellectuals in the early modern era. The essays in this book delineate the gradual shift from an emphasis on nonreligious knowledge as an aid for attaining religious perfection during the European Reformations, to the growing interest in knowledge about different religions in the Age of Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on theological, philosophical, medical, and anthropological knowledge, as well as on the efforts to gain knowledge of one's authentic self, the essays reveal the changing nexus between secular learning and religious faith, during the critical era when many European intellectuals abandoned the attempt to seek religious knowledge in favor of obtaining and propagating critical knowledge about religions.

Over the last three decades, Michael Heyd has explored the intersection of knowledge (and its dissemination) and the formation or adaptation of religious traditions from a variety of perspectives. Heyd's first book, *Between Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment: Jean-Robert Chouet and the Introduction of Cartesian Science in the Academy of Geneva* (1982), examines the reception of the New Science before the advent of Newton's *Principia*. Heyd argues that the transition from Neoscholasticism to the new mechanical science in the Academy of Geneva—an institution of higher learning founded by Jean Calvin in 1559—did not involve ideological clashes, and was relatively smooth. Leading figures in the Genevan Academy, as well as contemporary Calvinist pastors, regarded scientific knowledge as unrelated to religion, and therefore did not perceive Cartesian science as a threat to religious faith.

In his second book, *"Be Sober and Reasonable": The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (1995), Heyd elucidates the reactions of European elites to claims to direct divine inspiration in the post-Reformation era. The confrontation with individuals and groups

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Stroumsa has recently explored the early modern origins of the comparative study of religion in *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010).

who challenged established religious institutions by claiming unmediated contact with the divine, Heyd proposes, forced Protestant theologians to rely on both reason and nature. This “secularization of the religious consciousness” resulted from the medicalized critique of phenomena commonly categorized as religious enthusiasm, and contributed in turn to a broader secularization of society and culture in the eighteenth century.

Heyd later turned his attention to the underexamined attitudes of Christian European thinkers towards non-Christian phenomena of religious enthusiasm, such as the messianic movement of Sabbatai Zevi.<sup>2</sup> In more recent years, he has also been investigating the transformation of Renaissance notions of Original Sin, and their eventual marginalization with the advent of the Scientific Revolution and the early Enlightenment. Early modern approaches to the problem of Original Sin were related not only to peculiar religious outlooks, but also to attitudes towards children and their education. Heyd’s attention to the links connecting religious faith and the education of children is also manifest in a book on authority and autonomy within systems of religious education, which he coedited in 2011.<sup>3</sup>

Heyd’s interest in education, it should be noted, has never been a solely theoretical one. During his years as an M.A. student he worked as a history teacher at a Jerusalem high school, and following his appointment as a faculty member in the Hebrew University’s History Department he filled key positions in the Ministry of Education’s committees for revising the history curriculum in Israeli schools. No less important was his role in shaping the study of history at the university level in Israel in his various capacities as president of the Israeli Historical Society (2000–2007); as cofounder and coeditor of the first Hebrew-language scholarly historical journal (*Historia*); as founder of the Center for the History and Philosophy of Science at the Hebrew University; and as the editor-in-chief of major Hebrew textbooks on the Enlightenment. The importance that Heyd ascribes to higher learning is also manifested in the pioneering

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Heyd, “‘The Jewish Quaker’: Christian Perceptions of Sabbatai Zevi as an Enthusiast,” in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (ed. A. P. Coudert and J. S. Shoulson; Philadelphia, 2004), 234–65.

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Etkes, Tamar El-Or, Michael Heyd, and Baruch Schwarz (eds.), *Education and Religion: Authority and Autonomy* (Jerusalem, 2011) [in Hebrew]. See especially Heyd’s essay, “‘Train up the Child According to His Way’: Authoritarian Education or Training for Autonomy? Early Modern English Translations, Commentaries, and Sermons on Proverbs 22:6 as a Case Study,” in *ibid.*, 101–44.

volume that he coedited in 1997, on the foundation and early history of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup>

Michael Heyd has always been a devoted professor of history. With the exception of Myriam Yardeni, Joseph Mali, and David Heyd, the contributors to this book all share the privilege of having been his students. For all of us former students, attending Michael's introductory courses on early modern Europe was a significant experience, one that first excited our interest in the period to which we later decided to dedicate our academic careers. As Michael's students, we were exposed to the major historiographical trends in political, social, and cultural history in courses that dealt with subjects as varied as the English Civil War, the history of childhood and the family, the history of emotions, the history of manners, intellectual trends in the Enlightenment, the scientific revolution, or the process of secularization. The history that Michael taught had a decidedly human face. Even when discussing the thought of distinguished intellectuals, he treated them as human beings who had family relations, feelings, and more often than not, strong religious and existential beliefs or tormenting doubts. It is as a token of gratitude for all that we have learned from him that we wish to present him with this volume, on the occasion of his retirement after many years of dedicated teaching.

\* \* \*

Heyd's own studies have forced us to rethink common presumptions about the relationship between religious phenomena, institutions, and individuals, on the one hand, and the formation and dissemination of new kinds of knowledge on the other. As he shows in *Be Sober and Reasonable*, in the early modern era such relationships could be more complex than is usually assumed, and need to be explored in their unique historical settings. It is therefore only appropriate to dedicate a book in honor of Michael Heyd to questions pertaining to the relationship of religion and knowledge from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.

The first part of our volume presents two case studies of religious reformers who ascribed particular importance to specific types of knowledge, which they regarded as indispensable for attaining genuine religiosity. In the first essay, Myriam Yardeni discusses Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor as leader of the Reformed Church in Geneva, and his understanding

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<sup>4</sup> Shaul Katz and Michael Heyd (eds.), *History of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, 1997) [in Hebrew].

of the role of humanistic learning, and primarily the study of history, in establishing religious truth. Based on a close reading of Beza's *Icones*, Yardeni argues that while other leaders of the Protestant Reformation stressed the importance of scholarship, Beza went further than all others in assigning to humanistic knowledge an instrumental role in securing the final victory of the Reformation. Hence, Beza was even willing to praise the contribution of non-Protestant scholars, printers, patrons, and rulers, who (inadvertently) facilitated the spread of the Reformation by disseminating humanistic learning. Even the Jews are praised for the advancement of the scholarly knowledge of Hebrew and thereby also (Christian) scholarly understanding of the Holy Scriptures, a precondition for the establishment of reformed religion. Although Beza presents secular learning as a calling, Yardeni reminds us that he valued the study of history, and learning in general, as subsidiary aids for establishing the true faith.

The leaders of the Catholic reform in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries similarly perceived specific types of knowledge as indispensable for attaining religious perfection, as Moshe Sluhovsky demonstrates in his essay. Sluhovsky delineates the history of the penitential practice of general confession, focusing on its cultivation by Ignatius of Loyola and its subsequent adaptation by François de Sales. General confession, as advocated by such prominent figures of the Catholic Reformation, was an introspective practice that entailed acquiring knowledge of one's sins, inclinations, and thoughts. Unlike the modern search for self-knowledge, though, early modern Catholics' cultivation of the self was not aimed at self-realization, but rather at attaining spiritual growth and gaining control over one's passions. Nonetheless, this process required a highly developed sense of subjectivity, itself to be achieved by means of the introspective techniques outlined in Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* and in de Sales's *Introduction to the Devout Life*. Thus, Sluhovsky argues—*pace* Weberian and Durkheimian perceptions of early modern Catholicism as inherently exteriorized, ritualized, and communal—that the Catholic popularization of the practice of general confession contributed to the creation of the modern sense of self.

As Sluhovsky's essay makes clear, the Catholic proponents of introspective general confession were particularly concerned with instructing penitents on how to recognize and overcome their passions. Part Two of this volume focuses on approaches to the passions and their control in the scientific and medical writings of seventeenth-century thinkers.



Raz Chen-Morris traces the transformation of philosophical attitudes towards acquiring knowledge, a process that culminated in René Descartes' vindication of the epistemological value of the passions (along with human imagination) in his *Passions of the Soul* (1649). The evolution of this novel understanding of the role of passions in the investigation of nature signaled a break with the Neostoic heritage of philosophers such as Justus Lipsius, who during the wars that followed the breakup of Western Christendom, adopted a detached, skeptical outlook that devalued experiential pursuits.

Although Lipsius himself had originally engaged in botanical observation, in the aftermath of the Wars of Religion he came to advocate turning away from the study of nature in favor of an inner cultivation of constancy, to be achieved by the suppression of one's passions. The parallels between Lipsius's strict conception of the knowledge that one should pursue, his stress on interiority, and his preference for a complete resignation from the world, and the propagation—in those very years—of introspective practices by the Catholic figures discussed in Sluhovsky's essay, are clearly apparent. However, Chen-Morris argues that the tensions between inevitable involvement in the world and the mind's desired detachment, as recommended by Lipsius, continued to trouble European thinkers at the turn of the seventeenth century, and were closely connected to the philosophical concern with ensuring the hegemony of reason over the passions and the imagination. A concern for the relationship between the rational mind and the imagination ultimately came to characterize Descartes' later philosophy. Turning away from Neostoic attitudes, Descartes also affirmed that, once properly subjected to reason, the passions had a crucial role in obtaining scientific knowledge.

Descartes' discussion of how to become the master of one's passions was closely connected to the problem of how one should function in the social world. A preoccupation with suppressing one's passions, as well as with the social origins—and implications—of the pathologies that these passions might cause, is a recurrent theme in the medical writings of the seventeenth century, as Michal Altbauer-Rudnik shows. Altbauer-Rudnik analyzes the discussion of lovesickness in *The Treasure of Life* (1683), the first medical advice book originally written in Hebrew and the first published Hebrew book to be devoted exclusively to the propagation of medical knowledge. The author of this work, Jacob Zahalon, was a rabbi who had studied medicine at the University of Rome and then worked as a physician. As Altbauer-Rudnik remarks, Zahalon regarded the

medical profession as a divine mission, and even inserted a special “Prayer for Physicians” into one of his works. Thus, he epitomized the tradition of Jewish scholars whose writings, practices, and lives attested to the strong connections between their religious and medical knowledge.

Altbauer-Rudnik argues that *The Treasure of Life* was a pioneering self-help book, which aimed at making medical knowledge, practical and theoretical alike, accessible to Jewish nonspecialists. The work discloses Zahalon’s familiarity with classical medical traditions as well as his knowledge of Jewish traditions, but its contents were also clearly shaped by the author’s firsthand experience. Moreover, Zahalon’s medical writing was anchored in concrete social realities, and reflected the specific problems that troubled his potential upper-class Jewish readers, whom he considered to be especially prone to lovesickness. Altbauer-Rudnik suggests that this may explain why Zahalon emphasizes the nonphysiological nature of lovesickness, implying that this pathological condition had social roots and could be solved without recourse to medical treatments.

While Jewish scholars such as Zahalon helped shape the academic discourse in medicine as well as in other disciplines, Jewish rites, along with other non-Christian practices, themselves became an object of ethnographic study in the early modern era. Part three of the volume explores the intersection of religious polemics and the dissemination of knowledge about non-Christian religions and cultures in Western Europe. Yaacov Deutsch analyzes ethnographic descriptions of the rite of circumcision. Elucidating both the differences and the similarities in accounts of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Ethiopian practices of circumcision, Deutsch stresses the polemical nature of European ethnographic narratives. As he observes, a comparison of ethnographic descriptions indicates that circumcision continued to be perceived as primarily a Jewish ceremony. Thus, accounts of the practice among Muslims or Christian Ethiopians associated it with Jewish circumcision, while discussions that focused on Jewish circumcision did not allude to any non-Jewish practices. Deutsch suggests that while Jewish circumcision was always regarded as an inherently religious ceremony, Muslim and Ethiopian rites were often treated as nonreligious cultural customs.

Deutsch points out that Muslim circumcision was sometimes explicitly termed superstition—a concept examined from a different angle in Zur Shalev’s essay on travelers to the Levant in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Shalev argues that Englishmen who described their impressions of life in the Ottoman Empire did not simply propagate ethnographic

knowledge. Their writings were also strongly motivated by religious polemics against Orthodox Christianity and Islam, drawing on long-established European traditions that portrayed the Levant as a source of superstition. Nonetheless, Shalev proposes that travelers' accounts were also shaped by their encounters with the religiously diverse societies that flourished in the Ottoman Empire's urban trading centers. Arguing that Western Europeans' views of Eastern religions in the early modern era should not be viewed solely within the context of "othering" or "mirroring," Shalev points out that English travelers actively promoted their constructed "oriental superstition" by seeking out and purchasing talismans, mummies, and similar merchandise in Mediterranean cities.

As Asaph Ben-Tov demonstrates, superstition remained a central concept in the writings of European intellectuals in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Like the accounts of oriental rites composed by English travelers, the university disputations about pre-Christian gods written by German Lutheran theologians after the Thirty Years' War were motivated by contemporary religious strife. These disputations therefore equated classical paganism with Catholicism. Yet, by the early eighteenth century, the new intellectual currents, notably deism—which was associated in university disputations with ancient Epicureanism—made pagan (and Catholic) "superstition" seem less dangerous than skepticism or "atheism."

Ben-Tov shows that Lutheran theologians initially built on the tradition of Christian humanism in rebutting the claims of skeptical deists. Hence, they made use of philological methods and employed their knowledge of ancient languages and classical literature, while relying on Christian criteria to explain non-Christian religious phenomena. Nonetheless, a gradual shift in German university discourse began during the 1740s, as scholars abandoned the Christian humanistic approach, and began considering pagan myths and cults from a historical perspective, devoid of contemporary religious polemics.

The last part of our volume is devoted to thinkers who criticized the endeavors of eighteenth-century *philosophes* to employ scientific methods in search of the knowledge which they considered as pertinent for the amelioration of humanity. One of the best-known critics of the Enlightenment's progressive ideology was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose writings on theatre and politics are the topic of David Heyd's essay. Like Justus Lipsius (discussed by Chen-Morris in his essay), Rousseau was involved in botanical observation—which he regarded as a mental activity that

has no emotional dimension—but eventually came to reject scientific methodology. Nonetheless, Rousseau shared in the belief of Enlightenment intellectuals that it was possible to discover the truths of human life. As David Heyd observes, Rousseau devoted much of his life to the search for authentic self-knowledge. He insisted that knowledge of what one really is should be obtained through unmediated introspection. Yet in contrast with the Catholic proponents of introspective self-knowledge studied in Sluhovsky's essay, Rousseau did not advocate self-examination solely as a means for spiritual perfection, but rather as the ultimate goal of human life.

David Heyd analyzes Rousseau's concern over the moral and political dangers of theatre, as expounded in his *Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre*. Although this letter was published in 1758, the immediate circumstances that prompted its publication were related to the religious tumult of the Reformation era, and especially to the refashioning of Geneva as the model reformed city at the times of Calvin and Beza. Rousseau's letter was written in response to the entry "Geneva," which appeared in the French *Encyclopédie* in 1755 and recommended the introduction of a theatre to the city. As David Heyd notes, this suggestion alluded to Voltaire's decision to establish a theatre not far from Geneva in 1755. The establishment of this theatre provoked fierce opposition in the Calvinist city, where theatre was still regarded as a potential source of vice.

Joseph Mali's essay focuses on other eighteenth-century thinkers whose views, like Rousseau's, constituted important aspects of the Enlightenment, but who have been collectively referred to as champions of the Counter-Enlightenment since the publication of Isaiah Berlin's essay on the subject in 1973. The Counter-Enlightenment's intellectual critique, Mali reminds us, should not be confused with the ideological battle that the Enlightenment's enemies within the *ancien regime* waged against it. Rather, Counter-Enlightenment thinkers wished to point the movement in an alternative direction. As Mali observes, some Counter-Enlightenment intellectuals were devout Christians, while others held that religion was a necessary social institution. Moreover, they all shared a belief in divine Providence, and this common trait distinguished them from the leading philosophers of the Enlightenment. As with the Lutheran theologians that Ben-Tov deals with in his essay, the Counter-Enlightenment arose in reaction to what its proponents termed the "Epicurean" doctrines of the radical Enlightenment in France, but they set out to rebut these dangers by relying on new theories that befitted their times. According to Mali, Counter-Enlightenment thinkers were particularly fascinated with those

very mythic traditions that major Enlightenment philosophers from Descartes to Kant denounced as false perceptions that should be abandoned altogether. Mali proposes a modification of Berlin's original conceptualization of the Counter-Enlightenment, which underscores the insistence of the movement's champions on the continuing usefulness of ancient myths.

Taking us from the sixteenth-century Calvinist, Beza, to the critics of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, the essays in this volume attest to the far from obvious connections between religion and different kinds of knowledge in early modern Europe. It is our hope that this book, whose contributors are all indebted to Michael Heyd's inspiration, will encourage further investigation of questions of the kind that his own work has helped to articulate and elucidate.



PART ONE

RELIGION AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE AGE OF THE REFORMATION





ERUDITIO ANCILLA REFORMATIONIS:  
THEODORE BEZA AND THE USES OF HISTORY IN THE *ICONES*

Myriam Yardeni

It is no accident that two major works by Theodore Beza (1519–1605), the *Histoire Ecclesiastique*<sup>1</sup> and the *Icones*,<sup>2</sup> appeared in Geneva in the same year, 1580. The *Histoire Ecclesiastique* was published anonymously, with a fictitious publisher's name on the title page;<sup>3</sup> the *Icones*, published with the consent of the Geneva authorities by Jean de Laon, a friend of Beza, bore the name of the author. In many respects, the *Icones* is a companion volume to the *Histoire Ecclesiastique*, and together, they are Beza's most important historiographical writings.

Until recently, the *Icones* was considered a *parent pauvre* of the *Histoire Ecclesiastique*. The bulk of research on the former work concentrated on its portrait gallery *à l'ancienne*, and not on the accompanying text: the epigrams below the portraits and the short biographies following them. Irena Backus characterizes the work as: "composed of engravings with at most a paragraph of text identifying each figure. This situates them in the Varronian portrait genre that Simler in his *Life* of Gesner considered as inferior to and less instructive than written accounts of *Lives* of illustrious men."<sup>4</sup>

It is true that the *Icones* translates and simplifies the very erudite and detailed *Histoire Ecclesiastique* for simple believers, even for women—

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<sup>1</sup> Théodore de Bèze, *Histoire Ecclesiastique des Eglises réformées du royaume de France* (3 vols.; Geneva, 1581). For a modern edition, see Bèze, *Histoire Ecclesiastique* (ed. G. Baum and E. Cunitz; Paris, 1883–1889; reprint: Nieuwkoop, 1974); and see also Alain Dufour, "Bèze historien," in *Cité des hommes, cité de Dieu: Travaux sur la littérature de la Renaissance en l'honneur de Daniel Ménager* (ed. J. Céard, M.-C. Gomez-Geraud, M. Magnien, and F. Rouget; Geneva, 2003), 89–100; for Dufour, one of the leading specialists on Beza, the publication of the two works in the same year is a simple coincidence, but he does not deny the parallelism.

<sup>2</sup> *Icones id est verae imagines virorum doctrina simul et pietate illustrium, quorum praecipue ministerio partim bonarum literarum studia sunt restituta, partim vera religio in variis orbis Christiani regionibus, nostra patrumque memoria fuit instaurata: additis earundem vitae [et] operae descriptionibus, quibus adiectae sunt nonnullae picturae quas Emblemata vocant.*

<sup>3</sup> Antwerp is the fictitious place of publication, and Jean Rémy the fictitious publisher.

<sup>4</sup> Irena Backus, *Life Writing in Reformation Europe: Lives of Reformers by Friends, Disciples, and Foes* (Aldershot, 2008), 125.

especially in the French translation by Beza's friend Simon Goulart,<sup>5</sup> which appeared the following year.<sup>6</sup> Goulart made additions to the epigrams and supplied several new ones. Nevertheless, his main addition was the significant enrichment of the portrait gallery itself.<sup>7</sup>

The aim of the *Histoire Ecclésiastique* was to bring together all available information on the history of the Reformed churches in France: documents, reports, memoirs, and various narratives. Beza even integrated long passages from Regnier de La Planche, Louis de La Place, and La Popelinière into his history.<sup>8</sup> For his history of the martyrs, his source was the *Livre des martyrs* by his friend Jean Crespin.<sup>9</sup>

Even if the *Icones* summarizes and simplifies the *Histoire Ecclésiastique*, its immense importance as an autonomous volume cannot be neglected. In the past decade, some important contributions have revealed many new aspects of the book. Patricia Eichel-Lojkine<sup>10</sup> and Christophe Chazalon<sup>11</sup> discuss some of Beza's goals in publishing the *Icones*. Eichel-Lojkine highlights Beza's intention to strengthen and structure the collective memory of Reformed believers: "All aspects seem to be put together in the service of memory: the shortness of the texts, the sharpness of the

<sup>5</sup> On Goulart, see Leonard C. Jones, *Simon Goulart (1543–1628): Étude biographique et bibliographique* (Paris, 1917); Cécile Huchard, *D'encre et de sang: Simon Goulart et la Saint-Barthélemy* (Paris, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> *Les vrais pourtraits des hommes illustres en piété et doctrine, du travail desquels Dieu s'est servi en ces derniers temps, pour remettre sus la vraye Religion en divers pays de la Chrestienté. Avec les descriptions de leur vie et de leurs faits les plus memorables. Plus quarante quatre Emblemes Chrestiens. Traduicts du latin de Theodore de Besze* (Geneva, 1581), lxxx. On the history of this edition see Christophe Chazalon, "Théodore de Bèze et les ateliers de Laon," in *Théodore de Bèze (1519–1605): Actes du colloque de Genève (Septembre 2005)* (ed. I. Backus; Geneva, 2007), 69–87.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Borgeaud, "Le vrai portrait de John Knox," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du Protestantisme français* 83 (1934): 11–36.

<sup>8</sup> On the composition of the *Histoire Ecclésiastique*, see Marianne Carbonnier-Burkard, "L'Histoire Ecclésiastique des Eglises Réformées...: La construction bézienne d'un 'Corps d'Histoire,'" in Backus, *Théodore de Bèze*, 145–61. For discussions concerning Beza's authorship see the "Introduction" in *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze* (Société du Musée historique de la Réformation; 35 vols.; Geneva, 1999), vol. 21 (1580): viii–xiii.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Crespin, *Le Livre des Martyrs, qui est un recueil de plusieurs Martyrs qui ont enduré la mort pour le Nom de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ* (s. l., s. n.) [Geneva, 1554]. On Crespin as editor see Jean-François Gilmont, *Jean Crespin: Un éditeur réformé du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Geneva, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> Patricia Eichel-Lojkine, *Le siècle des grands hommes: Les recueils de vies d'hommes illustres avec portraits du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Louvain, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Christophe Chazalon, "Les *Icones* de Théodore de Bèze (1580) entre mémoire et propagande," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 66 (2004): 359–76.

classification, the stylization of the portraits.”<sup>12</sup> Eichel-Lojkine also points to the polemical and propagandistic aspects of the *Icones*. Chazalon, as well, stresses these aspects of the work, “entre mémoire et propagande.” At the same time, he places the *Icones* in a larger historical context, that of the tensions between Lutherans and Calvinists. For him, the aim of the work is also to play a federative role among the different Reformed churches.<sup>13</sup> Yet, only Alain Dufour touches, albeit briefly, on Beza’s conception of history as expressed in the *Icones*.<sup>14</sup> Analyzing the interaction between authenticity and veracity in Beza’s historical writings,<sup>15</sup> Dufour opens the way to a general reconsideration of the concept of history in the works of the sixteenth-century theologian.<sup>16</sup> To these three twenty-first-century works, one should add Daniel Ménager’s earlier seminal article on Beza as the biographer of Jean Calvin;<sup>17</sup> Ménager sees in Beza’s writing of Calvin’s life an “act” in the religious sense of that word.

The *Icones* consists of ninety portraits, but not all the spaces meant for them are filled in the first edition. Beza was unable to procure all the portraits he wanted to insert into his gallery.<sup>18</sup> Goulart added some new portraits to his French translation.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, a number of the portraits in both versions are inauthentic.<sup>20</sup> What was important to Beza was the *inner* “authenticity” of the portrait, its capacity to express convincingly the “religious” truth of his argument; this was a very important point in Beza’s conception of how to write the history of the Church.

Originally, Beza planned two volumes of *Icones*: the first one to be devoted to the Reformers and the martyrs of the Reformation, and a second to be devoted to the rulers and military figures who had contributed

<sup>12</sup> “Toutes les conditions semblent ici réunies pour servir la mémoire: La brièveté des textes, la rigueur du classement, la stylisation des portraits” (Eichel-Lojkine, *Le siècle des grands hommes*, 264). All translations in this paper are my own unless otherwise specified.

<sup>13</sup> Chazalon, “Les *Icones*,” 368–71.

<sup>14</sup> Alain Dufour, “Introduction,” in Théodore de Bèze, *Les vrais portraits des hommes illustres: Avec les 30 portraits supplémentaires de l’édition de 1673* (Geneva, 1986), vi–vii (this edition is cited in the present article); idem, *Théodore de Bèze, Poète et Théologien* (Geneva, 2006), 181–92.

<sup>15</sup> Dufour, “Bèze historien.”

<sup>16</sup> A task already attempted; see Carbonnier-Burkard, “L’Histoire ecclésiastique des Eglises réformées.”

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Ménager, “Théodore de Bèze biographe de Calvin,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 45 (1983): 231–55.

<sup>18</sup> Chazalon, “Les *Icones*.”

<sup>19</sup> Dufour, “Introduction,” iv–v.

<sup>20</sup> According to Chazalon only John Knox’s portrait fits this category; see Chazalon, “Les *Icones*,” 366.

to its propagation and diffusion. Nevertheless, some non-Protestant kings who were instrumental in the spreading of the Reformation, as well as some non-Protestant humanists, did find a place in the first and only volume of the *Icones*. The most important of these non-Protestants are King Francis I and Desiderius Erasmus.

The order of the portraits is roughly geographical and chronological.<sup>21</sup> Of course, the section on Germany and the German Reformation constitutes the bulk of the work, closely followed by that on France and the French Reformation. In some cases Beza dedicates an entry to a pair of Reformers, such as Ulrich Zwingli and Johannes Oecolampadius, or to collective portraits, like that of the *Vaudois*.

Considered an illustrated companion volume to the *Histoire Ecclésiastique*, the *Icones* did find a modest place in Reformation history. But the gallery portraits and their accompanying texts constitute much more than a comfortable and malleable companion volume. A thorough analysis of the texts reveals not only the richness of Beza's ideas and *Weltanschauung*, but also his extremely precise—and in some ways very original—conceptualization and interpretation of the Reformation as cultural history, and even as a cultural revolution. In this respect the intellectual biographies of the folio versos are much more important than the *emblemata* and verses of the rectos, for which Beza often merely reproduces some of the old texts of his *Juvenalia* and even borrows texts from other authors. Simon Goulart also “completed” some of these verso texts<sup>22</sup> with new additions. Taking into consideration all these aspects of the history of the *Icones*, our analysis will concentrate principally on the biographies of the versos.

Here a further remark is in order. These texts are not proper biographies: often there is no mention of where and when the person in question was born or had died. They are intellectual and spiritual biographies stressing the respective contribution of the martyr, the Reformer, or the scholar in question to the promotion and establishment of the “true religion.”

Thus, in these texts we can easily discover Beza the historian,<sup>23</sup> or, more precisely, Beza's conception of history. If in the *Histoire Ecclésiastique* Beza's main concern was the compilation and preservation of a vast

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 372–76.

<sup>22</sup> Dufour, “Introduction,” ii–iii.

<sup>23</sup> Or more precisely, his conviction that history has to serve the truth and be illustrated by authentic documents. In this respect the portrait is also a document.

corpus of documents and testimonies,<sup>24</sup> in the *Icones* it is his interpretation of Reformation history that occupies center stage. First of all, the Reformation is not only a chapter in Church history—it is the most important chapter after Jesus. It is not only a “reformation,” it is a rebirth, and as such, also a chapter in history *tout court*. Through these intellectual and spiritual biographies, Beza wants to shed light on the three major factors that, in his opinion, brought about this rebirth: Providence, martyrdom, and erudition.

Providence in Beza’s theology is a highly controversial concept.<sup>25</sup> As for Providence in history, things are perhaps less complex because this pillar is present everywhere, even if it does not annihilate human will—and certainly it is not a question of free will—and leaves intact the possibility of many personal initiatives, at least for some categories of believers.<sup>26</sup>

For Beza, Providence constitutes the guiding factor in history. One can discover Providence everywhere in the history of the Reformation. For the martyrs it provides the spiritual force to endure any suffering for the “true religion.” For scholars and humanists Providence creates the thirst for knowledge and the endurance to acquire it even if, in this respect, Beza posits a decisive role for human will and perseverance. In the choices made by martyrs and scholars another element is also at work: the unshakable belief that their choice is more than a promise of their election; for them this choice is a vocation that guarantees election.

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<sup>24</sup> Carbonnier-Burkard, “L’Histoire Ecclésiastique des Eglises réformées.” For an important introduction to the beginning of the Reformed Church and Reformation historiography see Alexandra Kess, *Johann Sleidan and the Protestant Vision of History* (Aldershot, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Was Beza a follower of Calvin or the founder of a new scholasticism in the Reformed tradition? For different perspectives on this question, see Walter Kickel, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Theodor Beza: Zum Problem des Verhältnisses von Theologie, Philosophie und Staat* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1967); Johannes Dantine, “Les Tabelles sur la doctrine de la prédestination par Théodore de Bèze,” *Revue de Théologie et Philosophie* 16 (1966): 365–77; John Bray, *Theodore Beza’s Doctrine of Predestination* (Nieuwkoop, 1975); Donald Sinnema, “Beza’s View of Predestination in Historical Perspective,” in Backus, *Théodore de Bèze*, 219–39.

<sup>26</sup> Myriam Yardeni, “Prédestination, vocation et prises de positions morales et décisions politiques chez Théodore de Bèze,” in *Hasard et Providence, XIV<sup>e</sup>–XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Actes du cinquantième de la fondation du CESR et XLIX<sup>e</sup> Colloque International d’études Humanistes, Tours, 3–9 juillet 2006* (ed. M.-L. Demonet; La Renaissance en Ligne; Centre d’études Supérieures de la Renaissance, 2007–2008); available online: <http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/publications/HasardetProvidence/fichiers/pdf/Yardeni.pdf>.

Martyrdom is a well-studied and much debated issue in recent research.<sup>27</sup> It is well known that Calvin and Beza diverge in their attitudes toward the question of martyrdom.<sup>28</sup> For Calvin it remains primarily a theological issue; for Beza, the historian, martyrdom is an exemplary active force in the propagation of the Reformation.

A third principal force that helped to accomplish the Reformation is erudition, specifically erudition over the *longue durée*. In history, the acquisition of erudition serves as a gradual process of eliminating darkness by shedding light; in human life, erudition is a link in the chain that will establish the final victory of the “true religion.”

For Beza the Reformation began with the rebirth and restitution of the humanities. It is no accident that in his portrait gallery we find the two extremely strange “Reformers” already mentioned: King Francis I and Erasmus.<sup>29</sup> The explanation for their presence lies in their contribution to the spread of learning and erudition, preconditions for the final victory of the Reformation. For Francis I this contribution centers on his immortal decision to establish the Collège Royal,<sup>30</sup> with its chairs for the learned, such as Guillaume Budé.<sup>31</sup> For Erasmus, notwithstanding the fact that he remained a Catholic, his immense contribution to learning constituted a decisive step in the spread of the “true religion.”<sup>32</sup> Kings, rulers, and military figures included in the *Icones* also contributed to the spread of the Reformation, not only by choosing the truth but also by supporting learning and erudition, as did James VI of Scotland (later James I of England).<sup>33</sup> Beza also mentions the printers, especially those of Basel, for

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<sup>27</sup> David El Kenz, *Les Bûchers du Roi: La culture protestante des martyrs (1523–1572)* (Seyssel, 1997); Frank Lestringant, *Lumière des martyrs: Essai sur le martyre au siècle des Réformes* (Paris, 2004); for a general view, see Brad. S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Among recent publications is that of Marianne Carbonnier-Burkard, *Jean Calvin: Une vie* (Paris, 2009), 106–8.

<sup>29</sup> Dufour, “Introduction,” vi.

<sup>30</sup> For all his contemporaries, as well as for the later members of the République des Lettres, this remained the king’s most glorious deed.

<sup>31</sup> Abel Lefranc, *Histoire du Collège de France depuis ses origines jusqu’à la fin du premier Empire* (Paris, 1893); Marc Fumaroli (ed.), *Les Origines du Collège de France (1500–1560)* (Paris, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Erasmus is second (after Reuchlin) in the gallery of the “Germans.” Following Erasmus is none other than Luther—who is given one page—whereas Melancthon has two pages.

<sup>33</sup> Such as the Archbishop of Cologne (and as such Imperial Elector) Hermann von Wied (1477–1552), who unsuccessfully attempted to introduce the Reformation into his city; and George III of Anhalt-Dessau (1507–1553), a German prince of the House of Asconia and Catholic priest, who possessed a considerable private library. After 1544

their immense role in advancing the cause of the Reformation.<sup>34</sup> Two cities, Basel and Strasbourg, are singled out for the role they played in the history of the Reformation.<sup>35</sup>

For Beza, erudition is clearly linked to the “true religion,” that of the Reformation. Erudition in Beza’s conception of the history of the Reformation becomes a *conditio sine qua non* for the final victory of the “true religion.” It was Providence that restored the *humaniores litterae*, and their meteoric spread was enabled by the providential invention of printing.<sup>36</sup>

The links between humanism, Renaissance, and Reformation have been thoroughly debated among both recent and earlier historians.<sup>37</sup> The importance of learning and erudition was cited more than once by the Reformers themselves,<sup>38</sup> but no one conceived them to be among the principal causes of the Reformation (together with Providence), as did Beza in his *Icones*. Frank Lestringant attributes this achievement to Beza without hesitation.<sup>39</sup> Beza’s conception of the overwhelming importance of learning and erudition in the birth and rise of the Reformation also constitutes, in the eyes of his Catholic biographers,<sup>40</sup> a reconciliation with

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George became the first ruler of Anhalt-Plötzkau; then, through the study of the Bible and the Church Fathers, he became Lutheran and received under his roof the great Lutheran scholar Joachim Camerarius and his family, when they were fugitives.

<sup>34</sup> Among others is Robert Estienne (1503–1559), a French printer in Geneva who published, among other things, a collation of the Bible, Calvin’s *Institution Chrestienne*, and the *Thesaurus linguae Latinae*.

<sup>35</sup> Thanks also to “Jacques Meier Bourgmaistre de Basle.”

<sup>36</sup> The classic work on this topic is still Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1979). See now also the more recent reassessments, in the 2002 *AHR Forum* articles: Anthony Grafton, “How Revolutionary was the Print Revolution? Introduction”; Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, “An Unacknowledged Revolution Revisited”; Adrian Johns, “How to Acknowledge a Revolution”; and Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, “A Reply to Adrian Johns,” *American Historical Review* 107.1 (February 2002): 84–128.

<sup>37</sup> Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanism and Holy Writ* (Princeton, 1983); for the Calvinist context, see Robert D. Linder, “Calvinism and Humanism: The First Generation,” *Church History* 44 (1975): 167–81.

<sup>38</sup> Lewis W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964).

<sup>39</sup> “Ce que le livre de Théodore de Bèze tente de renouer c’est le lien perdu de la Réforme avec l’humanisme. Ce qu’il tente de démontrer c’est la généalogie qui conduit en ligne directe de la renaissance des *Humaniores litterae* à celle de la connaissance de l’Evangile”; Frank Lestringant, “Autour du portrait de Michel de L’Hospital: Bèze et Thévet,” in *De Michel de L’Hospital à l’Edit de Nantes* (ed. Th. Wanegffelen; Clermont-Ferrand, 2002), 137–50.

<sup>40</sup> Such as Jerome Bolsec; see Backus, *Life Writing*, 163–67.



his humanist youth (which they found scandalous), his poetry, and his *Juvenalia*.<sup>41</sup>

According to Beza, it was Providence that decided when to put an end to darkness, ignorance, and superstition through the rise of a cohort of learned men,<sup>42</sup> a process accelerated by the invention of printing. But none of them, whether Erasmus,<sup>43</sup> Beatus Rhenanus,<sup>44</sup> or François Vatable,<sup>45</sup> dared to draw the “correct” conclusion of their learning, and so to adopt Protestantism. We can, though, find among this cohort a good number of Nicodemites, such as Michel de L’Hospital,<sup>46</sup> and even militant foes of the “true religion,” such as Francis I.<sup>47</sup> Their presence in the portrait gallery of the *Icones* shows that their knowledge or support of the *humaniores litterae* was as decisive as the exemplary life and death of the martyrs of the Reform and the hundreds of “erudites” and theologians.<sup>48</sup> Even Johann Förster, a member of Luther’s “Sanhedrin”<sup>49</sup> in Wittenberg and a fierce detractor of the rabbis and their knowledge of Hebrew,<sup>50</sup> finds

<sup>41</sup> Paul F. Geisendorf, *Théodore de Bèze* (Geneva, 1949), 16–28.

<sup>42</sup> The case of Lefèvre d’Étaples provides an example: “Vrayment la providence de Dieu est admirable! Car qui eust estimé qu’un seul homme de peu d’apparence eust peu chasser la barbarie hors de la plus fameuse université du monde” (*Les vrais portraits*, 153). Cf. Augustin Renaudet, *Préréforme et Humanisme à Paris pendant les premières guerres d’Italie, 1494–1577* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1953).

<sup>43</sup> “... il s’est contenté de taxer et de brocarder les superstitions, et refusant de profiter en la connoissance du principal, encore qu’il eust assez de jugement pour y atteindre, et de moyen par les doctes qui vivoient de son temps, au lieu d’y penser à bon escient il se rendit advocate d’une tres mauvaise cause” (*Les vrais portraits*, 25).

<sup>44</sup> “... c’est qu’il a tellement aprouvé la vraye Religion, que cependant il n’en a fait profession ouverte, soit qu’il fust d’un naturel craintif... ou plustost soit qu’en tells affaires il trovast bonne la procedure d’Erasme. Mais au reste, tous ceux qui aiment les bonnes lettres doivent beaucoup à ce personnage...” (ibid., 72).

<sup>45</sup> “Neantmoins, permettons que tu tienes ici la place que ta grande erudition et diligence t’ont acquise, encores qu’il semble bien que tu ne sois jamais entré en ce lieu où tu as conduit les autres” (ibid., 139).

<sup>46</sup> On Beza’s treatment of Michel de L’Hospital, see Lestringant, “Autour du portrait de Michel de L’Hospital”; and Marie-Dominique Legrand, “L’éloge de Michel de L’Hospital d’après Scévole de Sainte Marthe, Guillaume Colletet et Estienne Pasquier,” in *Histoire et littérature au siècle de Montaigne: Mélanges offerts à Claude-Gilbert Daboïs* (ed. F. Argod-Dutard; Geneva, 2001), 157–70.

<sup>47</sup> “... il m’a semblé que je ne devois laisser en arriere ce Prince, ci qui a remises en honneur les langues Hébraïque, Grecque, Latine, et les bonnes sciences, pour estre les portières du temple de la vraye Religion et qui a chasse l’ignorance laquelle empeschoit la vérité de venire en avant” (*Les vrais portraits*, 133).

<sup>48</sup> “Epictre: A très illustre Prince Jacques Sixiesme, par la grace de Dieu serenissime Roy d’Escosse (ibid., fol. \*\*\*ii).

<sup>49</sup> Luther’s name for the circle of Hebraists in Wittenberg.

<sup>50</sup> G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: A Third Language* (Manchester, 1983), 59–60.



a place in the *Icones*,<sup>51</sup> in spite of the fact that Beza himself very much appreciated the rabbis' importance for the restoration of the true sense of the Holy Scriptures.

For Beza, learning and martyrdom are both "acts," and perhaps the most important aspects of one's calling. These "acts" also reflect at the same time a certain autonomy of the human will, albeit guided by Providence. The respective weights of learning and martyrdom in the progress of the Reformation are shown in the subtitles given by Beza to the different sections of the *Icones*. For Beza, one of the most important contributions of learning lies in the revival of the three ancient sacred languages—Hebrew, Greek, and Latin—which leads to a better understanding of the Scriptures. Of course, the most problematic of these revivals was that of Hebrew, inseparable from Jews and Judaism. Here, Beza, perhaps the only true philosemite among the Reformers,<sup>52</sup> stresses without reservation the Jewish contribution to this field. He praises everybody, Jews, Christians, patrons, and printers, for advancing the knowledge of Hebrew;<sup>53</sup> and he does not forget to mention that Vatable's<sup>54</sup> and Jean Mercier's<sup>55</sup> knowledge of Hebrew was admired even by the Jews.

Beza likewise sees importance in the knowledge and study of other ancient Near Eastern languages, such as Aramaic.<sup>56</sup> The *bonnes lettres* are also given an important place. Other disciplines deemed important for study are what he calls the "choses naturelles":<sup>57</sup> jurisprudence,<sup>58</sup> medicine, philosophy, mathematics, geometry, and cosmography.<sup>59</sup> At the head of all the disciplines we find theology. In the *Icones*, there is a rigorously

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<sup>51</sup> *Les vrais portraits*, 39.

<sup>52</sup> Myriam Yardeni, *Huguenots et Juifs* (Paris, 2008), 59; Leon Poliakov, *Histoire de l'antisémitisme du Christ aux juifs de cour* (Paris, 1955), 217, also stresses Beza's "philosemitism."

<sup>53</sup> On Pierre Bufler Aleman d'Isne: "Ce fut lui qui ayant amené chez soy Ambroise Blaurer de Constance, pose les premiers fondemens de la vraye religion en la ville d'Isne; et qui par le conseil de Paul Fagius, dressa en la mesme ville une imprimerie et y fit venir à grands frais quelques doctes Juifs pour imprimer des livres en hebrieu..." (*Les vrais portraits*, 48).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 155. On the relations between the Reformers and Hebraists of Jewish origin, see Kenneth Austin, *From Judaism to Calvinism: The Life and Writings of Immanuel Tremellius (c. 1510–1580)* (Aldershot, 2007). Tremellius, still alive in 1580, is not in the *Icones* because of Beza's decision to include only people who were already dead.

<sup>56</sup> *Les vrais portraits*, 115.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

established hierarchy of all the learned disciplines, as we can see in the biographies of Caspar Cruciger or Joachim Vadian.<sup>60</sup> This hierarchy is very close to the hierarchy of disciplines followed in the Renaissance.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, it is no accident that Calvin figures in the *Icones* only as a theologian.<sup>62</sup> Other theologians, such as Martin Bucer, find a place, instead, in Beza's enumeration of erudite interpreters of the Holy Scriptures.<sup>63</sup>

Thanks to Johann Sleidan and Josias Simler,<sup>64</sup> history is also included in Beza's list of learned disciplines that furthered the spread of the Reformation. In the *Icones*, the role of history, or more precisely of writing the history of the Reformation, is to recapitulate all the branches of learning that serve—or have served—the cause of the “true faith.” Ironically this reminds one of Erasmus's enthusiastic enumerations of all the great figures of the Golden Age of the Renaissance who were instrumental in the rebirth of the *humaniores litterae* and the other branches of learning. Beza's gallery, on the other hand, includes only those who served, *nolens volens*, the good cause.

History, the history of the Reformation, the history of learning and erudition, and—why not?—cultural history are inextricably interwoven in Beza's *Icones*. In the *Icones*, learning becomes a calling. It is a historical force and a factor in the propagation of the Reformation. Learning is also a fundamental moral and spiritual factor in the history of humankind. In some ways, the *Icones* also sheds light on Beza, the heir of Calvin, as head

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<sup>60</sup> “Toutes les sciences, l'une à l'envi de l'autre s'attribuent Joachim Vadian, de Saint Gal, poète excellent, mathématicien et géographe parfait, comme il appert par ses commentaries sur Pomponius Mela et par l'epitome des trois parties du monde; Tres docte Medecin. . . Mais la Théologie devançant les autres sciences s'approprie à bon droit ce personnage. . .” (ibid., 111).

<sup>61</sup> Eugene F. Rice Jr., *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958).

<sup>62</sup> For Beza as Calvin's biographer, see Ménager, “Théodore de Bèze biographe de Calvin,” n. 18.

<sup>63</sup> *Les vrais portraits*, 52.

<sup>64</sup> “Mais l'éternel tesmoignage de ses travaux est ceste histoire de l'estat de la Republique et de la Religion en Alemagne depuis la reformation de l'Evangile commencée par Luter, descrite au vray en bons et beaux termes latins” (ibid., 69). Josias Simler, professor of theology and heir of Peter Martyr Vermigli in Zurich, was also a mathematician and historian: “Les escrits, specialement ceux par lesquels il a immortalizé son pays, monstrent combien il avoit diligemment leu les histories” (ibid., 108).

of the Academy of Geneva.<sup>65</sup> Like Calvin, he conceives of educating the young as a supreme task.<sup>66</sup>

In spite of all Beza's original and sometimes unique achievements, including the gathering of the mass of documents for his monumental *Histoire Ecclésiastique* and the innovative conception of the role played by learning and erudition in the history of the Reformation, he cannot be styled a historian. For Beza, truth is not a historical category; history, as well as erudition, is instrumental only for establishing religious truth. History, in the sense perceived by Cicero,<sup>67</sup> does not inspire him. The role of history, as well as that of erudition, is to serve the Reformation. Both are servants of the truth crystallized in the "true faith," that of the Reformed churches.

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<sup>65</sup> Charles Borgeaud, *Histoire de l'Université de Genève: L'Académie de Calvin, 1559–1798* (Geneva, 1900); Gillian Lewis, "The Geneva Academy," in *Calvinism in Europe, 1540–1620* (ed. A. Pettegree, H. Duke, and G. Lewis; Cambridge, 1994), 35–63; Karin Maag, *Seminary or University? The Genevan Academy and Reformed Higher Education, 1560–1620* (Aldershot, 1995).

<sup>66</sup> Beza praises "Pierre Cholin de Zug en Suisse, professeur des lettres humaines a Zurich," for his interest in educating youth: "Mais ce qui a esté le principal et plus excellent en ta vie, est que fuyant toute ambition et ne voulant estre veu, tu t'adonnas à enseigner la jeunesse..." (*Les vrais portraits*, 112).

<sup>67</sup> "Nam quis nescit, primam esse historiae legem, ne quid falsi dicere audeat? Deinde ne quid veri non audeat? Ne qua suspicio gratiae sit in scribendo? Ne qua simultatis?" (Cicero, *De Oratore*, II.15.62).



## GENERAL CONFESSION AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE IN EARLY MODERN CATHOLICISM

Moshe Sluhovsky

General confession was a penitential practice that enjoyed significant popularity in late medieval and early modern Europe.<sup>1</sup> It was adopted, adapted, and popularized by the Jesuits, among others, only to later recede into obscurity and oblivion. In what follows, I first explain what, exactly, general confession was, and why it has been difficult to document its history. I then address its diffusion and decline, and in the final section of the article argue (albeit briefly) the significance of this practice for a reevaluation of the relations between Catholicism and modern notions of the self and practices of introspection. The connections between sin and confession, as well as the complex dialectics between early modern religious thought and religious experiences, and between religion *tout court* and modernity, have been at the center of Michael Heyd's scholarly work. While Heyd has dealt mostly with Protestant articulations of these issues, the following pages suggest that viewing these interactions from a Catholic angle adds an important dimension to the ongoing scholarly enterprise of explaining the role of religion in the transition to secular Western modernity.

In its Fourteenth Session, in 1554, the Council of Trent ruled that priests can only absolve those sinners who itemize their sins with as much detail as possible, and that a general confession contradicts the very purpose of the sacrament of penance: "For it is evident that priests could not have exercised this judgment... had the faithful declared their sins in general only and not specifically and one by one."<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, it was in that very same year that the method of prayer of Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Professor Robert A. Maryks for commenting on an earlier draft of this article and correcting a few embarrassing mistakes. Whenever possible, I have used standard English translations of early modern texts. In all the citations from original early modern editions for which no English translation is noted, translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 14.5 (ed. H. J. Schroeder; Rockford, Ill., 1978), 92–93.

and her spiritual experiences were considered suspect by her Dominican confessors, and she was advised to consult a Jesuit father. To this father, the founder of the Discalced Carmelites “gave a perfectly clear description of [her] whole life and spiritual state in the form of a general confession.” Teresa wrote down “all my good and bad points and prepare[d] the clearest account of my life that I possibly could, leaving nothing unsaid.” This was a life-transforming experience for the Spanish saint, which “seemed to make [her] quite a different person.”<sup>3</sup> The priest approved the divine source of her experiences and her method of prayer, and she was, as we all know, to become a canonized saint shortly after her death and, in the modern era, also a Doctor of the Church. Carmelites, following Teresa, made general confession part and parcel of their spiritual regimen. Teresa’s *Autobiography* and *Way of Perfection* appeared in French translations in 1601, and shortly afterward the Spanish reformer appeared in a series of apparitions to Madame Barbe Acarie (1566–1618). Since the late 1590s, Acarie, a devout Parisian lay woman, had turned her house into a gathering place for a group of devout lay people and clerics; following her visionary encounters with the Spanish holy woman, Acarie initiated the invitation of the Discalced Carmelites to France. Acarie, too, adopted the practice of general confession. After undertaking a general confession, she recommended the practice to her own spiritual sons and daughters.<sup>4</sup> General confession, she explained, serves to validate incomplete previous confessions. But more importantly, only general confession can lead to and fortify a genuine conversion.<sup>5</sup> Vincent de Paul, the early seventeenth-century French missionary, concurred. General confession “puts people in such good state that demons cannot abuse them.”<sup>6</sup> As soon as the seventeenth-century Provençal mystic Jeanne Perraud (1631–1676) made a general confession she “felt as if she had peeled off the old skin that had covered her until then.” And the demoniac-turned-mystic Jeanne des Anges (1602–1665) underwent a general confession which ignited in her

<sup>3</sup> Teresa of Avila, *Life*, in *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus* (ed. and trans. E. A. Peers; 3 vols.; London, 1957), 1:23, 151–52. See also Félix Rodríguez, “Santa Teresa de Jesús y sus consejeros jesuitas,” *Manresa* 59 (1987): 309–11.

<sup>4</sup> Among them Louise de l’Hôpital, abbess and reformer of the Benedictine convent of Montivilliers, Normandy, who made her general confession in the chapel in Acarie’s home. Yves Chaussy, *Les Bénédictines et la réforme catholique en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (2 vols.; [Paris], 1975), 1:176.

<sup>5</sup> Marie de l’Incarnation [Madame Acarie], *Les Vrais exercices de la bienheureuse soeur Marie de l’Incarnation* (Paris, 1623), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Vincent de Paul, *Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents* (ed. P. Coste; 14 vols.; Paris, 1920–1925), 2:429.

what she later described as a “desire to conduct myself from now on in a different manner, and step by step I started to acquire such an inclination for prayer that I no longer lost any time avoiding it.”<sup>7</sup>

As the contradiction between the decree of the Church Council and the testimonies of these devout Catholics makes clear, general confession must have meant different things to different people. It is very likely that in denouncing the confession of “sins in general,” the bishops and theologians of the Council of Trent had in mind the Protestant practice of confessing sins generally at the beginning of Mass. But within early modern Catholicism itself, as both John O'Malley and Adriano Prosperi have already observed, the term “general confession” was both confused and confusing.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, before we proceed, a terminological clarification is in order. General confession was the homonymous name of a number of penitential practices, among them a “generic” (“complete”) sacramental confession which lists all possible sins and is meant to stimulate awareness of sins and help the penitent recall sins;<sup>9</sup> a non-sacramental,

<sup>7</sup> [P. Raphaël], *La vie et les vertus de la soeur Jeanne Perraud, dite de l'Enfant-Jésus* (Marseille, 1680), 29; Soeur Jeanne des Anges, *Autobiographie d'une hystérique possédée* (ed. G. Legué and G. de la Tourette; Montbonnot-St. Martin, 1985), 60, 118–20. Alas, des Anges's natural evilness soon led her back to sin, and a few months after undergoing her first general confession she undertook another one. But the demons that possessed her prevented her from enjoying the benefits of this confession too.

<sup>8</sup> John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 137–39; Adriano Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza: Inquisitori, confessori, missionari* (Turin, 1996), 487–95.

<sup>9</sup> As José Calveras has shown for Spain, Roberto Rusconi and Miriam Turrini for Italy, and Pierre Michauld-Quantin and Bert Roest for the rest of Catholic Europe, “general confession” was a popular term from the second half of the fifteenth century for what I call, following Prosperi, *generic* confession. I use this term to denote a confession that follows the medieval scholastic tradition of focusing on “Who, what, where, by whom, how often, why, in what manner, when” (*Quis, quid, ubi, per quos, quotiens, cur, quomodo, quando*). Guides for confessors and/or for penitents, many of them with the term General Confession in the title, enumerated different sins, classified according to different taxonomies: the seven deadly sins; sins that violate the Ten Commandments; sins against the seven senses of the body; the twelve articles of faith; the seven virtues, etc. See José Calveras, “Los ‘confesionales’ y los Ejercicios de San Ignacio,” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 17 (1948): 51–101; Pierre Michauld-Quantin, *Sommes de casuistique et manuels de confession au moyen âge (XII–XVI siècles)* (Louvain, 1962), 86–91; Roberto Rusconi, “‘Confessio generalis’: Opuscoli per la pratica penitenziale nei primi cinquanta anni dalla introduzione della stampa,” in *I frati minori tra '400 e '500: Atti del XII convegno internazionale, Assisi, 18–20 ottobre 1984* (Assisi, 1986), 189–227; Miriam Turrini, *La coscienza e le leggi: Morale e diritto nei testi per la confessione della prima età moderna* (Bologna, 1991), 33–139, 315–497; Bert Roest, *Franciscan Literature of Religious Instruction before the Council of Trent* (Leiden, 2004), 339–53. A good example of this confessional tradition is Olivier Maillard's *La Confession generale*. Maillard (ca. 1430–1502) was an Observant Franciscan preacher who wrote two manuals for confessors and devout lay penitents: *La Confession generale* (n.p., n.d.; eight editions were published before 1527); and *La Confession de Frère Oliuier*

liturgical-communal public confession (*Confiteor*), recited in the vernacular, at the beginning of Mass, for collective absolution (and which absolves minor sins only);<sup>10</sup> and a concise confession on one's deathbed.<sup>11</sup> In Southern France, in the Low Countries, and in Germany the term "general confession" was also used to denote an annual public confession by the entire community during Lent, and on either Holy Thursday or Good Friday.<sup>12</sup> The latter was viewed as a good and beneficent practice for inducing sorrow and repentance, but it could not substitute for a complete auricular private confession and therefore could not lead to an absolution by a priest.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the homonymous use of the term widened further to include the generic or concise confessions that missionaries conducted in the European countryside. Missionary orders—Jesuits, Lazarists, and Capuchins—made general confessions of this type the dramatic climax of their preaching expeditions. By the 1540s, the Jesuit Silvestro Landini, a missionary to Northern Tuscany and to

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Maillard (Paris, 1481; with seven additional editions before 1529). Maillard's *Confession generale* itemized in succession the sins against the five senses, the seven deadly sins, the works of mercy, the sacraments, the Ten Commandments, the twelve articles of faith, the seven virtues, and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. General confession in this sense, then, means a confession that is both generic and as complete as possible. Other examples of such manuals include: Guillaume Letard, *Confession générale sur les dix commandements de la Loi* (Toulouse, 1555); Jehan Columbi, *Confession générale avec certaines reigles au commencement, très utiles tant à confesseurs qu'à pénitents* (Lyon, 1548); Pietro Conciarino, *Confessione generale* (Rome, 1567).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, 1977), 111–16; Nicole Lemaître, "Pratique et signification de la confession communautaire dans les paroisses au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Pratiques de la confession des Pères du désert à Vatican II* (ed. Groupe de la Bussière; Paris, 1983), 139–64.

<sup>11</sup> One "should review his life as a whole in order to make a general confession—this is something that any man of honor should do before he dies," wrote François de Sales in a letter to Jeanne de Chantal on October 14, 1604; in François de Sales, *Oeuvres complètes* (27 vols.; Annecy, 1892–1964), 12:352. In 1634, the new lay group of the *Dames de la Charité de l'Hôtel Dieu* in Paris took over caring for the sick and dying in this hospital. Among the 120 women in the group, 14 were charged with instructing women in how to make a general confession "for better preparing them for a good death... and for those who recover to resolve not to offend God"; in de Paul, *Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents*, 13:766. General confession in *articulo mortis* is associated first and foremost with the name of Vincent de Paul. There are three crucial theological concerns during penance, he explained: the capabilities of the confessor; the completeness of previous confessions; and the degree of sincerity and contrition that accompanied them. And since no one can ever be sure of all three, general confession, "in which one confesses all their previous sins, whether they had already been confessed or not," is strongly recommended for all Christians approaching death (*ibid.*, 13:772).

<sup>12</sup> Lemaître, "Pratique et signification de la confession"; W. David Myers, "Poor, Sinning Folk": *Confession and Conscience in Counter-Reformation Germany* (Ithaca, 1996), 87–88.



Corsica, had adapted Ignatius of Loyola's meditations for the first and second week of the *Spiritual Exercises* into a series of sermons which instructed his listeners to examine their conscience by way of meditating on sin, punishment, the Last Judgment, and paradise. The communal examination of conscience then led listeners to penance and "interior conversion," which terminated in a series of public general confessions.<sup>13</sup> In 1616–1617, Vincent de Paul and Jesuits from Amiens conducted a similar mission among the peasants of the parishes of Folleville in Picardy, leading people to penance. They then devoted two whole months to hearing thousands of individual general confessions.<sup>14</sup> In 1632, the Jesuit Jean-François Régis (1597–1640), a missionary to Calvinist-infested Vivarais (Ardèche, Rhône), south of Lyon, conducted thousands of general confessions in three days, following three days of preaching penance around the clock. These confessions, while individual, could not but be perfunctory.<sup>15</sup> They were adaptations, to new circumstances, of the late medieval general confession during Mass, Lent, and Holy Week; a practical solution, as David Myers rightly points out, to a pressing need to confess and absolve hundreds or thousands of people at once.<sup>16</sup>

Last but not least, general confession was a recounting of one's entire life to a priest in a setting of an individual and private examination of conscience and in order to arrive at spiritual peace. And it is this latter form of general confession whose history and significance I now wish to examine. For its proponents, this type of general confession is "a reform of the interior man." As Jeanne des Anges's quote above indicates, general confession is a transformative event that reforms and reshapes both the past

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<sup>13</sup> Armando Guidetti, *Le missioni popolari: I grandi gesuiti italiani* (Milan, 1988), 25–28; E. Dos Santos, "Les missions des temps modernes au Portugal," in *Histoire vécue du peuple chrétien* (ed. J. Delumeau; 2 vols.; Toulouse, 1979), 1:431–54.

<sup>14</sup> Vincent de Paul, *Sermons de saint Vincent de Paul, de ses coopérateurs et successeurs immédiats* (2 vols.; Paris, 1859), 1:203. See additional examples in Wietse De Boer, *The Conquest of the Soul: Confession, Discipline, and Public Order in Counter-Reformation Milan* (Leiden, 2001), 177–79.

<sup>15</sup> Guillaume Daubenton, *Vie de St Jean-François Régis de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Lyon, 1844); Joseph Vianey, *Saint François Régis: Apôtre du Vivarais et du Velay (1597–1640)* (Paris, 1914), 132–33. For additional examples, see Bernard Dompnier, "Mission et confession au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Pratiques de la confession*, 201–22; François Lebrun, "La pastorale de la conversion et les missions intérieures: L'exemple des lazaristes en Haute-Bretagne au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *La conversion au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Actes du XII<sup>e</sup> Colloque de Marseille (janvier 1982)* (Marseille, 1983), 247–55. And see the two tractates by two leading missionary confessors: Jean Eudes, *Le bon Confesseur ou Avertissemens aux confesseurs* (Lyon, 1689); and Leonardo da Porto Maurizio, *Direttorio della confessione generale* (Rome, 1731).

<sup>16</sup> Myers, "Poor, Sinning Folk," 96, 171.

and the future. It not only absolves previous sins, but also puts into action a mechanism that enables both a spiritual awakening in the present, and the potential for permanent self-improvement in the future. Indeed, for Pierre Favre (1506–1546), Ignatius of Loyola's disciple, the greatest benefit of general confession lies in the future: general confession, more than anything else (!), is a foundation for a new life.<sup>17</sup> For Jerome Nadal (1507–1580), who entered the Society of Jesus in 1545, general confession “puts in a new soul,” while for the prolific Jesuit author Gaspar de Loarte (1498–1578), who joined the Jesuits in 1552, general confession is a way “to begin to make a new book” of one's life.<sup>18</sup> The *Directory to the Spiritual Exercises of the Society of Jesus* of 1599, stating the official Jesuit position, explains that general confession is “a considerable help for [the] reformation [of the soul]. . . . Experience shows that this has been very profitable for many men and has aided them toward self-knowledge and amendment.” While amendment points backward, the benefits of self-knowledge and what the *Directory* calls the “inauguration of a new life” lie in the future.<sup>19</sup> The Jesuit *Constitution* agrees. General confession, it advises, should be prescribed for Jesuit students every six months “because of its many benefits.”<sup>20</sup>

Discussing Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, Michel de Certeau pointed out that the text of the *Exercises* is an indication of a *hors-texte*; it is a libretto that was created to accompany a music we do not hear while reading the *Exercises* themselves.<sup>21</sup> The same could be said about “transformative” general confession; and, as we shall see shortly, the connection between Loyola's *Exercises* and general confession is intrinsic. Like, say, computer games today, “transformative” general confession is a practice acquired through experience, not through reading. And yet, we can describe it as a devout practice that is directed by an experienced mentor, who, through an examination of conscience by means of a series of introspective meditations, leads the confessant-penitent to acquire a deeper awareness of the sense of sin in general and of his/her sinfulness

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Favre (Peter Faber), “Capita quaedam de fide et moribus,” in *Fabri monumenta: Epistolae, memoriale et processus* (Rome, 1914), 120.

<sup>18</sup> Both quotes are from O'Malley, *First Jesuits*, 139–40.

<sup>19</sup> “Official Directory of 1599,” in *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599* (ed. and trans. M. E. Palmer; St. Louis, 1996), 309, cf. 317.

<sup>20</sup> *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and their Complementary Norms* (St. Louis, 1996), no. 98.

<sup>21</sup> Michel de Certeau, “L'espace du désir, ou le 'Fondement' des Exercices spirituels,” *Christus* 20:77 (1973): 118.

and corrupt nature in particular. Looking into the abyss and acquiring the knowledge of oneself as a sinner and, consequently, the awareness of God's mercy, is a transforming experience that generates a new and reformed self. It opens the gates to a new life. It is in this sense that general confession is a conversion.

The Jesuit order cultivated and promoted the practice of "introspective" general confession but did not invent it. Loyola himself had made a general confession in the Catalan Benedictine monastery of Montserrat in 1522, and, already in the previous century, the Franciscan Observant Michele Carcano of Milan (1427–1484) had emphasized in his manual for confessors the importance of an examination of conscience by the penitent as the very essence of confession.<sup>22</sup> The promotion of an examination of conscience was similarly not a Jesuit novelty and had been repeatedly recommended by canonists, preachers, and authors of catechisms and confessionals.<sup>23</sup> Loyola's contribution was the personalization and individualization of the practice. Rather than arousing the penitent to an awareness of sin by itemizing all possible sins and interrogating the confessant as to whether he or she had committed them, as had been common in almost all late medieval confessionals and auricular confessions, Loyola asked the penitent to participate in a collaborative project of calling to memory his or her own individual sins and the contexts in which they had occurred.<sup>24</sup> His method supplied the penitent with a kit of exercises that were to facilitate the sinner's recollections of the exact causes and circumstances of the transgression, the feelings that accompanied it, and the soul's consent to it.

Loyola's general confession in Montserrat covered his entire life and lasted three days. His personal experience laid the foundation for the

<sup>22</sup> Michele Carcano, *Incomincia la Confessio[n]e generale* . . . (Venice, 1493).

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Alain de Lille, *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, in *Patrologia Latina*, 210:172–73, 279–304; Andr  s de Escobar (d. 1472), whose *Modus confitendi* (which also circulated under the title *Confessio generalis*) was printed in more than ninety editions in the fifteenth century; and many additional examples in Turrini, *La coscienza et le leggi*, 217–722. See also Anne T. Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching, and the Coming of the Reformation* (Aldershot, 2002), 53–64. On the specific sources of Loyola's spirituality of general confession, see Calveras, "Los 'confesionales' y los Ejercicios"; Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* (Chicago, 1964), 152–67; Pierre Gervais, "Ignace de Loyola et la Confession g  n  rale," *Communio* 8:5 (1983): 69–83.

<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that the Council of Trent also demanded that the penitent recount "the circumstances of the specific sin" (*Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, ed. Schroeder, 14.7).

prominent place of general confession in his *Spiritual Exercises*.<sup>25</sup> Loyola then directed his early companions in the practice, proposing, for example, to Pierre Favre, already during their very first meeting in Paris in 1534, that he make a general confession and a daily examination of conscience.<sup>26</sup> In his *Spiritual Exercises*, Loyola advised that the appropriate time to undergo a general confession was at the end of the first week of the *Exercises*, a week dedicated to meditations intended as a purgation of sin from the exercitant's soul.

The *Exercises* of this first week instruct the confessant to recall to memory the earliest sins in history, namely the sins of the Fallen Angels and of Adam and Eve [50–51]. Then the confessant is to recall his or her own sins according to the time, place, and context in which they were committed [25]. The “point is to consider who I am and abase myself” [58]. This stage is followed by a plea to the Virgin to grace the confessant with a comprehension of the disorder of his or her actions. The fifth and final Exercise is a meditation on Hell. Conducting a general confession at this time is beneficial for three reasons. First, it thus follows “the greater sorrow experienced at present for all the sins” the confessant has just recalled; secondly, during this week, “one reaches a deeper interior understanding of the reality and malice of one's sins than when one is not so concentrated on interior concerns. In this way, by coming to know and grieve for the sins more deeply during this time, one will profit and merit more than was the case on earlier occasions.” And, finally, the deeper apprehensions of one's past leads to a better disposition to receive the Holy Sacrament as well as to “preserve the increase of grace” [44].<sup>27</sup> General confession at the end of the first of the four weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises*, then, is a sacramental confession that supposedly works where regular Easter sacramental confession often fails, namely, in overcoming the all-too-human inclination toward recidivism. And while it is a transformative (and even conversion) experience, it is also a devotional voluntary practice that may be repeated when the need arises.

Thus, as Gil González Dávila (1532–1596), the Jesuit Provincial of Castile in the second half of the sixteenth century, explained, general confession

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<sup>25</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *Autobiography*, 3:17. All the quotations from Loyola's writings are from Antonio T. de Nicolas's edition: *Powers of Imagining: Ignatius de Loyola* (Albany, 1986).

<sup>26</sup> Favre, “Memoriale,” in *Fabri Monumenta*, 494.

<sup>27</sup> Following the standard norm of quoting the *Exercises*, the numbers in brackets refer to the paragraph number.

is an itemizing as well as a remembering of “the crimes and evil deeds of previous life,” leading to a general comprehension of one’s sinfulness.<sup>28</sup> It is both an examination of conscience and a stimulant to sorrow and contrition, as were traditional “generic” general confessions. But, unlike the traditional general confession, the *Spiritual Exercises* are both general enough and flexible enough to elicit a space for the confessant to meditate on and repent of his or her personal sins, while the confession is conducted under the supervision of an attentive instructor whose role resembles that of a physician rather than an accuser. Finally, unlike many traditional confessionals and late medieval auricular confessions, this mode of confession includes not only sinful acts and thoughts but also evil inclinations (*malicias*).<sup>29</sup>

A major reason why “introspective” individualized general confession is so beneficial is that it aids overcoming scrupulous thoughts.<sup>30</sup> Ignatius suffered from these and devoted a special section of the *Spiritual Exercises* to scruples [345–351]. Following his general confession in Montserrat, his scrupulosity only increased. His confessor ordered him never to confess his past sins again, but Loyola’s scrupulous apprehensions continued unabatedly until he learned to discern the dialectical powers of consolation and desolation within himself. The ability to decipher these interior movements, affections, and inspirations was for Ignatius a liberating experience. The whole purpose of the *Spiritual Exercises* is “to conquer oneself, and to organize one’s life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment” [21]. There are three kinds of thoughts in each person’s mind: individual thoughts that “come solely from my own liberty and will; the other two come from without, the one from the good spirit and the other from the evil one” [32]. Making the *Exercises* liberates the penitent from the control of external spirits and enables both the penitent and the director to recognize the interior vocation of the practitioner [73].

In Loyola’s case, once he had acquired self-knowledge and overcome his scrupulous anxieties, which in the past had prevented him from advancing spiritually, he comprehended that he did not need ever to confess his past sins again. Loyola also attained another insight: confession works best when it is accompanied not only by a personal examination of

<sup>28</sup> Directory of Gil Gonzáles Dávila, in Palmer, *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises*, 248.

<sup>29</sup> José Calveras, “Notas exegéticas sobre el texto de los Ejercicios,” *Manresa* 23 (1951): 211–17.

<sup>30</sup> Luis Pujadas, “La ‘Confesión general’ con la Comunión,” *Manresa* 9 (1933): 45–53.

conscience but also by a methodical training in the discernment of spirits.<sup>31</sup> Years later, in 1551, when asked by the Portuguese Jesuit Antonio Brandão whether a penitent should itemize sins during confession (as the Council of Trent was to rule), or whether a general and brief confession was satisfactory, Loyola used this insight to distinguish between two types of confessants. Those who tend to fall into mortal sins should confess in detail. For them he also recommended the traditional method of listing sins against the Ten Commandments, the seven deadly sins, etc. ([18]; also, "Three Ways of Prayer," [238–48]). Those, however, who are "drawn to doubts and difficulties, seeing sin where there is no sin," would do better to confess only a general confession. Loyola also stated that "a close scrutiny of fine points is not as helpful toward sorrow as is getting an overall view of one's serious sins."<sup>32</sup> General confession, then, liberates. It puts the penitent in a state of quietude and peace that enables him or her to embark on a life of spiritual growth toward a well-ordered life that is not controlled by internal passions and desires.

But is this type of general confession a sacramental confession? Unlike sacramental auricular confession, general confession is not mandatory and "a person who confesses annually is not obliged to make a general confession" [44]. The official Jesuit *Directory* of 1599 explained another major difference between an auricular confession and a general confession. Only after an exercitant finished a set of exercises and meditations, conducted under the supervision of a spiritual director, and gained "deep interior knowledge of his sins and genuine contrition . . . should [he] be advised to prepare himself for a general confession." General confession demands special preparations because experience has "shown that persons often approach confession without sufficient examination, or without due sorrow, and with little or no purpose of amendment."<sup>33</sup> Such a confession is both a sacramental confession and a devotional practice, and its voluntary and devotional characterization is of immense importance, because such

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<sup>31</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *Autobiography*, 3:22–25; Pierre Favre also remembered that it was only after he had undertaken a general confession that he was able, for the first time in his life, "to see clearly within his conscience" without being obstructed by scrupulous thoughts. Favre, "Memoriale," in *Fabri Monumenta*, 493.

<sup>32</sup> "To Father Antonio Brandão," in *Counsels for Jesuits: Selected Letters and Instructions of Saint Ignatius Loyola* (ed. J. N. Tylenda; Chicago, 1985), 44; "Second Directory of St. Ignatius," in Palmer, *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises*, 10; cf. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Palmer, *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises*, 317. It is important to note, though, that a number of late medieval confessionals already demanded a preparatory period of a few days prior to auricular annual confession. See, for example, Alfonso de Tostado de Madrigal, *Cofesional* (Salamanca, 1498), sig. b(2).

a characterization circumvents accusations of heterodoxy. If general confession is not a mandatory sacrament but a voluntary devotional practice, it does not call into question the validity of previous sacramental confessions and absolutions, nor does it challenge the authority of parish priests.<sup>34</sup> Other evidence, however, supports the claim that general confession was, in fact, a sacrament. It is obvious that a sacramental confession was the goal of the first week of the *Exercises*, and the *Second Directory* of the Society even advised that the confessor should be somebody other than the spiritual director. Often, obviously, it was the same person. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–1690), the seventeenth-century Visitandine nun and a leading promoter of the cult of the Sacred Heart, described thus her own general confession: “My Divine Master permitted that a Franciscan Father should come to our house, and remain for the night that we might have an opportunity of making our general confessions. I had written mine about a fortnight before, for although I was in the habit of making a general confession whenever I had an opportunity, it seems to me that I could never do so often enough on account of my great sins.”<sup>35</sup> Her general confession was undoubtedly a sacramental confession in which there was a two-week hiatus between contrition and absolution, and the same Franciscan father conducted both the preparations and the confession. General confession could therefore be conceived as a sacramental confession which featured a temporal gap between the different parts of the sacrament. In the first, preparatory part, the penitent-confessant absorbed and comprehended the meaning of his or her sins within a context or a life trajectory. This process is then followed by a sacramental absolution.

Another aspect of introspective general confession that calls for our attention is its relation to the traditional examination of conscience. The latter had previously been taught to believers in catechisms and sermons, but it was neither a liturgical activity nor a formal part of the sacrament of penance. Implicitly and metaphorically, one could argue that the examination of conscience had now become part of the sacrament. The introspective stage of confession (the examination of conscience and the contrition) is the only means to make sure that the exterior stage (absolution) does not merely absolve the sinner but also enables a life

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the criticism of the Dominican Bartolomeo de Medina in his *Breve istruzione de' confessori* (Venice, 1582), quoted in Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, 494.

<sup>35</sup> “Second Directory to the Spiritual Exercises,” in Palmer, *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises*, 171; *The Autobiography of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque* (trans. Sisters of the Visitation, Partridge Green; Rockford, Ill., 1986), 46.



without sin and without scruples. Here, too, it is important to remember that general confession did not introduce a new theology or a new understanding of the meaning of confession. But it did emphasize the *contritio in corde* more than many older forms of confession. The examination of conscience prior to the general confession deepens the confessant's ability to internalize his or her sinfulness and to regret it so profoundly that, coming out of the experience, the confessant is reborn.<sup>36</sup> General confession, then, becomes the act of (writing and) recounting one's autobiography of sin as well as one's program for reform. Loyola's innovation, one could argue, was the merging of the examination of conscience, the sacrament of confession, and the crucial role of spiritual direction in these endeavors into a week-long spiritual undertaking.

Who should enjoy the benefits of "introspective" general confession? The practices that gave birth to general confession, including the examination of conscience and spiritual direction, had been practiced in monastic communities since the Desert Fathers, as well as among late medieval male and female mystics. The *Spiritual Exercises* were written for novices of the Society of Jesus, but Loyola himself started instructing lay people even while composing the first version of the *Exercises* and writing down his own general confession. His secretary, Alfonso de Polanco (1516–1576), wrote on his behalf that lay people, including women and married ladies, should have access to the first week of the *Exercises* and to general confession.<sup>37</sup> General confession also became a prerequisite for membership in Jesuit lay confraternities (Sodalities) and Marian congregations (including the fallen women of the Casa Santa Marta in Rome), and was popularized and recommended for all devout Catholics who wanted to advance in their spiritual life.<sup>38</sup> Jesuit missions, as we have seen, encouraged penitence and led to "generic" general confessions. But for some, the

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<sup>36</sup> Paolo Segneri, *L'Instruction du penitent, ou la methode pratique pour se bien confesser* (Paris, 1696; first published in Italian in 1669 as *Il Penitente Istruito a ben confessarsi*), 280–315.

<sup>37</sup> "Directives and Instructions of St. Ignatius," in Palmer, *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises*, 25.

<sup>38</sup> Louis Châtellier, *Europe of the Devout: The Catholic Reformation and the Formation of a New Society* (Cambridge, 1989); Michael William Maher, "Reforming Rome: The Society of Jesus And its Congregations at the Church of the Gesù" (2 vols.; Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1998), vol. 2; Lance G. Lazar, *Working in the Vineyard of the Lord: Jesuit Confraternities in Early Modern Italy* (Toronto, 2005); Ulderico Parente, "Aspetti della confessione dei peccati nella Compagnia di Gesù a Napoli tra XVI e XVII secolo," in *Ricerche sulla confessione dei peccati a Napoli tra '500 e '600* (ed. B. Ulianich; Naples, 1997), 145–48; Myers, "Poor, Sinning Folk," 175–79.



mission became an opportunity for a more thorough conversion as well. During the mission conducted by the French Jesuit Pierre Coton (1564–1626) in Aix en Provence in 1601,

members of all social groups and all occupations showed up, pushing each other to determine who would be the first to reach the confessors and the altar. And the more eminent among them even asked this man of God to confess a general confession of their entire past life, wishing to start a new [life] under his direction and his spiritual patronage.<sup>39</sup>

Coton's mission, then, combined both types of general confession. He offered concise confessions to the masses and introspective, transformative general confessions to spiritual or social elites. By the later years of the sixteenth century, the practice of general introspective confession, which in the past had been restricted to monastic and mystical circles, was recommended for the masses and practiced by large segments of the urban devout population, as well as, possibly, by nonurban elites.

Both Jesuits and non-Jesuits contributed to the diffusion of general confession in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus, for example, the Spanish Dominican preacher Luis de Granada (1504–1588) explained in his immensely popular *Guía de pecadores* (*Sinners' Guide*) of 1556 that general confession is much more than a confession of sins. It is a devotional practice, a remembrance of sinfulness in general rather than in its particular incarnations, and a method of maintaining a state of "quiet within the soul" and tranquility.<sup>40</sup> Granada's best-selling book included an example of a short general confession of one's entire life, as well as numerous spiritual exercises, to be practiced by the penitent readers of his guide. Two other major promoters of general confession were not themselves members of the Society of Jesus, but were shaped by its spirituality. Carlo Borromeo (1538–1584), the archbishop of Milan from 1564 to 1584, who had himself made a general confession with the Jesuits, incorporated many of Loyola's insights into his *Instructions for Confessors* of 1574. For him, as for

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<sup>39</sup> Jean-Marie Prat, *Recherches historiques et critiques sur La Compagnie de Jésus en France au temps du Père Coton, 1564–1626* (Lyon, 1976), 705–6. See additional examples in Robert Aleksander Maryks, *Saint Cicero and the Jesuits: The Influence of the Liberal Arts on the Adoption of Moral Probabilism* (Aldershot, 2008), 21–25.

<sup>40</sup> Luis de Granada, "Primera Guía de pecadores," in *Obras castellanas* (2 vols.; Madrid, 1994), 1:499–500.

Saint Ignatius, general confession was meant to lead to conversion and amendment of one's life.<sup>41</sup>

The third promoter of general confession, and the one who was, in turn, to shape Jesuit spirituality itself, was the Savoyard saint François de Sales (1567–1622), whose *Introduction to the Devout Life* of 1608 (augmented in 1609) was published in more than forty editions within ten years, and was the most popular spiritual guide in early modern Catholic Europe. De Sales, too, was a product of the Jesuit educational system and had studied in the Society's colleges in Paris and Padua. His book follows closely the organization and structure of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. But unlike the *Exercises*, which were composed for directors of spiritual retreats, de Sales's book was addressed directly to an ideal devout lay female reader, Philothea.<sup>42</sup>

According to de Sales, the first step toward God is "purification of the soul" by way of confession. But confession is not a simple undertaking. One should first look for the best confessor available, and then prepare oneself by reading a few guides for penitents. The penitent should then recall "point by point in what way you have done wrong from the time you reached the use of reason until the present hour." This recollection of sins is best carried out in writing. But de Sales, like Ignatius before him, does not require writing down sins. Each reader, he repeatedly instructs, should adapt the guide for her own needs and station in life, which in some cases, obviously, takes illiteracy into account.<sup>43</sup> In order to facilitate the recollection of sins, de Sales offers a series of meditations on the creation of the world and of humanity, divine graces, sins, death, judgment, hell, and paradise [book 1, chapters 9–18]. These meditations, too, follow very closely the first week of Loyola's *Exercises*. Having completed the meditations, the penitent is ready to "go on bravely and in the spirit of humility to make a general confession" [1:19].

"Note carefully, Philothea," de Sales cautions, "that I speak of a general confession covering your whole life. I readily grant that this is not always absolutely necessary, but I consider it exceedingly useful in this

<sup>41</sup> Carlo Borromeo, *Avvertenze . . . ai confessori nella città et diocesi sua*; in *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis* (ed. A. Rati, 2 vols.; Milan, 1890–1896), 2:1870–1893. See also Giovanni Sofia, *La dottrina di S. Carlo Borromeo sui doveri del confessore* (Venegono Inferiore, 1983); De Boer, *Conquest of the Soul*, 77–79.

<sup>42</sup> François de Sales, *Introduction à la vie dévote* (2 vols.; Paris, 1930).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Gaspar de Loarte, *Esercizio della vita Christiana* (Cagliari, 1567 [1568]), fol. 5–7; quoted in O'Malley, *First Jesuits*, 139.

opening period and therefore I earnestly advise it." General confession is recommended because regular sacramental confessions are often incomplete, as penitents at times forget specific sins or are too ashamed to confess them. Additionally, most confessions regrettably fail to bring a conversion of heart (which, as previously mentioned, was always a standard part of penitence), and are soon followed by a resumption of one's customary life of sin. A general confession, on the other hand, "summons us to know ourselves, arouses wholesome sorrow for our past life, makes us marvel at the mercy of God . . . [and] provides our spiritual director with an opportunity to advise us more properly." It is a "complete conversion by undertaking a devout life" [1:6] and terminates with the practitioner's consecrating him- or herself to God [1:20].

For de Sales, then, as for Loyola, general confession is a re-formation, a conversion. It is both a sacrament and a devotional practice, and more than regular confession it points both backwards and forwards. Like all sacramental confessions, it includes the itemizing of sins past, and terminates with an absolution. But more than a standard confession, it is also a new beginning. Ideally, according to both Loyola and de Sales, the process of conversion thus begun is to be continued through periodic examinations of conscience and frequent additional confessions, the goal of which is to further advance self-awareness and self-formation as a Christian.

However, we should not ignore an important difference between Jesuit general confession and its Salesian avatar. The preparatory stages of the Salesian general confession do not necessitate a dialogue with a director. While de Sales promoted spiritual direction and directed many devotees, among them many women, his ideal Philothea can practice on her own and prepare for her general confession by reading manuals and following de Sales's *Introduction to the Devout Life*.

She should always consult with spiritual directors and confess to confessors. But self-interrogation, the recollection of sins, and the arrangement of these recollections into a coherent biography of one's life as a sinner could take place prior to the encounter with this figure. In fact, we can argue that what Luis de Granada and François de Sales did was to continue Loyola's own effort to "democratize" the access of penitents to spiritual exercises and meditations, and to lead devout lay Christians not only toward absolution of sins but also toward examination of conscience and conversion. Interestingly, most French and many non-French Jesuits of the seventeenth century used François de Sales's *Introduction to the Devout Life*, rather than Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, as their model for

conducting general confessions and spiritual retreats for the laity. This was due, I assume, to the fact that de Sales wrote explicitly for the laity while Loyola's *Exercises* were meant originally to instruct novices.<sup>44</sup>

Be it as it may, the practice of introspective general confession became popular all over Catholic Europe, and was advocated and practiced by members of all religious orders.<sup>45</sup>

But at the very same time that "transformative" or "introspective" general confession was being adopted, it was also starting to lose ground. From its inception, the practice was to be accompanied or followed by daily personal examinations of conscience and by frequent auricular confessions [*Spiritual Exercises*, 24–26].<sup>46</sup> From the earlier years of the seventeenth century, a growing number of confessors and moralists published guides for daily or frequent examination of conscience, and while they all still recommended a general confession of one's entire life, their emphasis clearly shifted toward more continuous devotional practices. This intensification of devotion included both "mundane" practices such as frequent confession and frequent Communion, and more advanced levels of spiritual pursuits, such as contemplation.<sup>47</sup>

Pierre Coton, in a 1606 review of the state of the Society of Jesus, emphasized not general confession but the importance of perpetual scrutiny of interior spiritual motion and self-examination.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Louis Lallemant (1587–1635), the most prominent Jesuit instructor of his generation, lamented that some Jesuits mistook their conversion following general confession for perfection itself. They wrongly believed that their success as missionaries, popular preachers, and father-confessors was a

<sup>44</sup> Guibert, *Jesuit Spirituality*, 347–51. See, for example, Nicolas Caussin, *Traité de la conduite spirituelle selon l'esprit du Bienheureux François de Sales* (Paris, 1637).

<sup>45</sup> Luis de la Puente, *Directorio spiritual para la confesion, communion, sacrificio de la misa* (Seville, 1625); Segneri, *Instruction du penitent*; Nicolas Caussin, *La Cour sainte* (Paris, 1625); Thomas Le Blanc, *Le Bon valet* (Dijon, 1660); Barthélemy Jacquinot, *Instruction spirituelle pour une âme qui desire se conserver dans le ferveur* (Paris, 1620); Florent Vaillant, *Instructions spirituelles aux personnes dévotes et religieuses pour bien pratiquer les exercices journaliers* (Lille, 1627); and many additional examples in Turrini, *Coscienza e le leggi*, and Maryks, *Saint Cicero and the Jesuits*, 32–47.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Fabri Monumenta*, 40–41.

<sup>47</sup> Michel de Certeau, *La Fable mystique* (Paris, 1982), 330–73; Henri Bremond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France* (12 vols.; Paris, 1916–1933), vol. 5; Turrini, *Coscienza e le leggi*, 228–41.

<sup>48</sup> Coton's memorandum was published by de Certeau in "Crise sociale et réformisme spirituel au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Une 'Nouvelle Spiritualité' chez les jésuites français," *Revue d'Ascétique et de mystique* 41 (1965): 347–48. Cf. de Certeau, *Fable mystique*, 337–44.

proof of their merit. In fact, this attitude was nothing but vainglory and self-love. “An examination of conscience [that] is carried out only at certain times” is insufficient. A “review of past actions and of numerous actions together”—a reference to introspective general confession—falls short of a true conversion. One ought instead to “cross the threshold” (*franchir le pas*): to renounce all inclinations, desires, and wills; in short: to gain control over the soul to unite it completely with God’s will. Rather than periodic introspection or general confession, one should maintain a purity of heart and engage in “*confession journalière*,” perpetual discernment of interior spirits, and the cultivation of an unceasing surveillance mechanism that questions actions at the very time that they are taking place and that reviews all spiritual effects as they are occurring.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Lallemant’s student Jean Rigoleuc (1595–1653) recalled Loyola’s recommendation [24–26] to conduct an examination of conscience three times a day, as well as François de Sales’s recommendation in 1609 to his female penitent to “retire various times a day into the solitude of the heart even while outwardly engaging in discussions or transactions with others” [2:12]. Spiritually-inclined individuals should write down their shortcomings not only in preparation for a general confession but “numerous times during the day.” Furthermore, they should put their heart under constant surveillance (*garde du coeur*), constantly monitoring each of its “movements.”<sup>50</sup> Frequent, even daily confession and Communion and permanent routine examinations of conscience became by the second quarter of the seventeenth century the new focus of Jesuit spirituality, and these practices were recommended to spiritually-inclined lay people by both the Jesuits and members of other religious orders. This “spiritualization of the laity,” in its turn, ignited the major theological controversies between supporters and opponents of Probabilism and between Jesuits and Jansenists, controversies that further distracted theologians and preachers from advocacy of general confession.

As a mechanism or a regimen for self-transformation, general confession was always only one among a number of early modern Catholic devotional practices that encouraged a heightened attention to interiority. The second half of the sixteenth century witnessed a sharp decline in the

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<sup>49</sup> Louis Lallemant, *La Vie et la doctrine spirituelle* (Paris, 1959), 91–92, 111, 119–20, 122, 129, 133–35, 227, 252.

<sup>50</sup> Pierre Champion, *La vie du P. J. Rigoleuc avec ses traités de dévotion et ses lettres spirituelles* (Paris, 1686), 235, 225.

number of guides for confession that went under the name “general confession” and that merely listed all possible sins, and a parallel increase in the number of guides for an examination of conscience.<sup>51</sup> The new guides were also more likely to be addressed to the general lay population or to specific segments of this population. Following Loyola, much of this literature advised different regimens of self-examination for different people, based on their social or spiritual standing, their occupation or gender, and the amount of time they could devote to spiritual pursuits.

Like spiritual direction and examination of conscience, the writing of spiritual diaries and spiritual autobiographies, and the discernment of movements (spirits) within the soul, general confession trained early modern Catholic believers to constitute themselves as religious subjects that are unique beings, with unique histories and individual purposes. It enabled practitioners to cohere their life experiences into a chronological narrative, and to set themselves goals of spiritual growth. The history of Catholic “introspective” general confession is thus part and parcel not only of the history of confession and penance but also of the history of the emergence of a new sense of self and of the creation of a new type of introspective identity, two major characteristics of modern subjectivity.<sup>52</sup> Obviously, there is a wonderful paradox at the very core of Catholic practices of self-knowledge, self-formation, and introspection, among them general confession. Unlike the modern search for individual self-fulfillment in accordance with one’s innermost inclinations, the introspection and cultivation of the self we are dealing with here were meant to fine-tune the soul to God’s original design. And unlike mystics (including Loyola himself), whose goal was to annihilate the self and become absorbed into the divine, the Jesuit priest and the nun or the lay woman he was directing through spiritual exercise, examination of conscience, and general confession were practicing in order to achieve the more mundane goals of temperance and quietude. This desire to overcome one’s passions and inclinations, however, required a highly developed sense of subjectivity, and this could only be achieved by practicing, and advancing through, introspective techniques. “It is absurd to think that we can enter Heaven without first entering our own souls, without getting to know ourselves,” warned Teresa of Avila. “The first disposition to reach a union

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<sup>51</sup> John Bossy, “The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25 (1975): 21–29; Turrini, *Coscienza e le leggi*, 212–24.

<sup>52</sup> For an opposite view, see Myers, “*Poor Sinning Folk*,” 183, 199.

with the divine is to penetrate into the depths of one's interiority," agreed Jean-Joseph Surin, Lallemand's disciple and one of the most original mystics and spiritual directors of the seventeenth century. And the celebrated French theologian Bossuet put it succinctly in the opening paragraph of his treatise *On Self Knowledge and the Knowledge of God*: "La connoissance de nous-même nous doit élever à la connoissance de Dieu."<sup>53</sup> One had to cultivate one's own self in order to then grow spiritually, gain control over one's self, and acquire knowledge of God. As such, while the techniques of interior self-knowledge may resemble modern practices of introspection, their goal was far removed from that of the self-fulfilling modern subject, who follows his or her own desires toward self-actualization.

This being said, I want to close this article by arguing briefly that a history of modern subjectivity cannot be written without close scrutiny of the Catholic contribution to self-knowledge. The history of introspective individualism is currently shaped by two paradigms, which I will call, for heuristic purposes alone, the Weberian paradigm and the Foucauldian paradigm. The former goes back to the binary division between Catholic ceremonialism, materiality, and, above all, exteriority, on the one hand, and Protestant spiritualization of religion, individualization, and interiority, on the other, and is as old as the Reformation itself. In fact, one could argue that it is even as old as Christianity itself, which in late antiquity portrayed Judaism with the same attributes that were assigned by Protestants, in the sixteenth century, to Catholicism. But, unlike other confessional polemical and skewed portrayals of rival Christian confessions, the distinction between Protestant interiority and Catholic exteriority has not merely survived the early modern period but has itself given birth to much of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century study of religion. From the Genevan "rationalist" pastor and theologian Jacob Vernet (1698–1789) and Albert Réville (1826–1906), the first holder of the Chair of History of Religions at the Collège de France, to Max Weber (1864–1920) and Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) in the early twentieth century, rituals

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<sup>53</sup> Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* 2:1, in *Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, 2:218; Jean-Joseph Surin, *Correspondance* (Paris, 1966), 1212 (letter 407); Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, "Traité de la connoissance de Dieu et de soi-même," in *Oeuvres complètes* (52 vols.; Paris, 1828–1831), 13:65. Within the Christian tradition, the recognition of the connection between self-knowledge and the knowledge of God goes back at least to St. Augustine, who starts his prayer in the opening chapter of Book II of his *Soliloquies* with the words: "Nouerim me, nouerim te" ("Let me know myself, let me know Thee"). Augustine, "Two Books of Soliloquies," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series* (ed. P. Schaff; 14 vols.; Buffalo, 1886–1889, 7:2; repr. Peabody, Mass., 1994).



(read also Catholicism) have been posited as the opposite of sincere and “spiritualized” belief (read also Protestantism, Puritanism, and Pietism).<sup>54</sup> Throughout, this reading has led historians to associate Protestantism with modernity and progress. Catholics, who perform communal and ritualized exterior acts of devotion and penance, arguably lack the sense of interiority and individualism that characterizes Protestants (mostly of the Reformed tradition); Protestants themselves, however, through acts of listening to sermons, confessing to fellow believers or directly to God or their personal diaries, and doing penance in the heart, are capable of developing a modern sense of self.<sup>55</sup> The history of introspective general confession, as well as of other Catholic techniques of interior knowledge (mentioned but not analyzed in this article), I propose, contributes to the dismantling of this five-hundred-year-old self-congratulatory Protestant edifice.

A second paradigm that has been proposed and promoted over the last forty years is connected, above all, with the names of Michel Foucault and Jean Delumeau and with the German Confessionalization thesis. Early modern Catholic confession, the argument of this school goes, did contribute to modernity. But its contribution was an unmitigated oppression. Modern confessional practices were guilt-producing mechanisms that

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<sup>54</sup> Jacob Vernet, *Réflexions sur les mœurs, la religion et le culte* (Geneva, 1769); Albert Réville, *Prolégomène de l'histoire des religions* (Paris, 1881); Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York, 2002; originally published in 1905); Emile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Paris, 1912). See also Patrick Cabanel, “L’institutionnalisation des ‘sciences religieuses’ en France (1879–1908): Une entreprise protestante?” *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 140:1 (1994): 33–80; R. Emmet McLaughlin, “Truth, Tradition, and History: The Historiography of High/Late Medieval and Early Modern Penance,” in *A New History of Penance* (ed. A. Firey; Leiden, 2008), 19–71.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Burke, “The Repudiation of Ritual in Early Modern Europe,” in idem, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication* (Cambridge, 1987), 223–38. The collapse of this dichotomy is at the very center of current work on ritual among both anthropologists and historians of religion. See, among others, Talal Asad, “Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual,” in idem, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, 1993), 55–79; Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York and Oxford, 1992); eadem, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York and Oxford, 1997); Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York, 1996); Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997); Susan C. Karrant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany* (London, 1997); Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven, 2002); Christian Grosse, *Les rituels de la Cène* (Geneva, 2008); Alexandra Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed,” *Historical Journal* 51:2 (2008): 497–528.



functioned in the service of the disciplining regimes of state and Church.<sup>56</sup> They internalized fear and submission to authority, and created docile citizens.

This view, I argue, is both reductionist and one-dimensional. We should take early modern promoters of introspective practices at their word. Their agenda was to instruct a growing number of people in the benefits of consolation, to release them from scrupulous thoughts, and to enable them to acquire knowledge and therefore control over their interior “movements” and affects. These introspective practices permitted early modern Catholics to make sense of their lives, to connect events and acts to thoughts and feelings, to compile their autobiographies by way of fixing chaos into a coherent narrative. Admittedly, one’s life story enfolded within the context of the grand narrative of human damnation and salvation, and it was not only scrutinized but also co-shaped by confessors. But introspective confession nonetheless repeatedly instructed and trained practitioners to think of themselves as individuals who control, or should get control over their lives. As we have seen, this promotion of individualized, self-conscious selves was at the root of the opposition to late medieval generic general confessions and to communal confessions. And, in fact, as the major theological controversies of the seventeenth century demonstrate (and as modern promoters of the Confessionalization thesis ignore), there was a subversive potential to introspective general confession and its related practices. Accusations of Pelagianism (or at least, of semi-Pelagianism) accompanied these introspective techniques from the start; often, spiritual directors and confessors, the alleged agents of absolutist state and Church, found themselves being instructed by their penitents rather than the other way around.<sup>57</sup> The history of general

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<sup>56</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *Introduction* (New York, 1978); Jean Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur: La culpabilisation en Occident (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris, 1983); idem, *L’aveu et le pardon: Les difficultés de la confession, XIII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1990); Wolfgang Reinhard, “Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State: A Reassessment,” *Catholic Historical Review* 75 (1989): 383–404; Heinz Schilling, “Confessional Europe,” in *Handbook of European History 1400–1600* (ed. T. A. Brady, Jr. et al.; 2 vols.; Leiden, 1995), 2:641–75; Thomas A. Brady, Jr., “Confessionalization: The Career of a Concept,” in *Confessionalization in Europe, 1555–1700: Essays in Honor and Memory of Bodo Nischan* (ed. J. M. Headley et al.; Aldershot, 2004), 1–20.

<sup>57</sup> Adelisa Malena and Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci, “La direzione spirituale delle donne in età moderna: Percorsi della ricerca contemporanea,” *Annali dell’Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* 24 (1998): 439–60; Patricia Ranft, *A Woman’s Way: The Forgotten History of Women Spiritual Directors* (New York, 2000), 87–156; Jodi Bilinkoff, *Related Lives: Confessors, Female Penitents, and Catholic Culture, 1450–1750* (Ithaca, 2005). For the

confession and of other early modern Catholic practices of subject formation challenges the view of all three early modern confessions as active participants in the manufacture of internalized submission. Instead, this history calls for the integration of early modern Catholicism into a new general history of the modern individual self, a history that is neither overshadowed by the Protestant route to modernity nor assumes that religion is merely an epiphenomenal façade for political control.

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medieval background, see especially John W. Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York, 2006).

PART TWO

MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE



## IMAGINATION, PASSIONS, AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE: FROM LIPSIUS TO DESCARTES\*

Raz Chen-Morris

Confronting the tumult of the aftermath of the Reformation, humanists sought to reestablish constancy as a guiding moral principle of self-fashioning. This Neostoic attitude, in repressing the imagination and the passions, had certain epistemological repercussions, however: it fostered a detached disposition combined with a skeptical outlook that devalued the investigation of nature as a futile and vain pursuit. The turn of the seventeenth century witnessed the emergence of new modes of knowledge that led to a critical reexamination of the Neostoic attitude. From Shakespeare to Descartes a novel understanding evolved concerning the role of the imagination in the acquisition of knowledge about the natural world—vindicating, in consequence, the epistemological and moral value of the human passions.

### *The Botanical Nymph in the Garden of Constancy*

The second half of the sixteenth century in Northern Europe was a period of turmoil and civil strife. To the usual martial horrors of massacres and destruction was added the warring parties' rigidity of religious convictions and their uncompromising faith that "God is on our side." In the lands of the Holy Roman Empire, a precarious peace followed the treaty of Augsburg (1555). France was gradually being engulfed by a cruel civil war in which religious emotions and dynastic rivalries rendered futile any attempt at compromise. Atrocities such as the massacre of the Huguenot elite on the night of St. Bartholomew's Day of 1572 were followed by

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\* In 1981 I had the privilege of attending Professor Michael Heyd's undergraduate seminar on the Radical Reformation, a fantastic introduction to the study of early modern European culture and the history of science. This seminar was critical in determining my intellectual career and I present this essay as a sign of my deep gratitude to Professor Heyd. Most of the work on this paper was carried out during my stay as a Rosenblum Fellow at the Folger Shakespeare Library in the summer of 2009.

political murders, wandering bands of soldiers, and bloody riots climaxing with the horrors of Henri de Navarre's 1590 siege of Paris. England, in the aftermath of Queen Mary's unsuccessful attempt to reinstate Catholicism and ward off the process of reform initiated by Henry VIII, witnessed heightened religious tensions and the merciless persecutions of dissidents and other religious minorities.

The religious tensions in the Netherlands erupted in 1565, as iconoclastic fervor led bands of Calvinists to assault magnificently decorated churches, chapels, and cathedrals in all the major cities of the country.<sup>1</sup> These riots were countered by strict measures taken by the Habsburg king of Spain, who sent over the duke of Alba to subdue the rebellious population. The duke reestablished the Inquisition, and under the brutal control of "The Council of Troubles," attempted to crush the dissenting religious sects then flourishing in the Netherlands. The result was a long and bloody civil war that lasted well into the seventeenth century.

In the midst of the raging wars of religion in the Netherlands the young Justus Lipsius (1547–1606), on his way to Vienna, supposedly sought refuge in the house of his wise friend Langius outside Liège. Langius (Charles de Langhe, or Lang; 1521–1573) served as a canon of the cathedral at Liège, and was 25 years older than Lipsius. He studied in Louvain and led a calm life devoted to religion, scholarship, and horticulture. Over a decade later Lipsius described his supposed meeting with Langius in his treatise *De Constantia* (*On Constancy*). In their long discussion, Lipsius writes, Langius taught him the merit of constancy and the futility of fleeing his homeland, and urged him to seek consolation and refuge, not in the external world, but solely by means of the exercise of his own rational aptitude. Endurance, not flight, is the necessity of the moment, and the principle that should guide one's whole life; *constantia*, *patientia*, *firmitas* are the watchwords for resistance against the external ills of the world.

This conversation, however, never actually took place; and Lipsius, threatened by the Inquisition and the institution of the Council of Troubles, fled Louvain to the imperial court in Vienna to try and make his way in the humanist circles of Maximilian II. Lipsius did not stay in Vienna for long. Shortly after his arrival, he applied for a position at the Lutheran University of Jena, where he publicly accepted Lutheranism. Only a couple of years later he tried to return to Catholic Louvain, but was prevented

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent assessment of the Dutch wars see Herbert H. Rowen, "The Dutch Revolt: What Kind of Revolution?" *Renaissance Quarterly* 43:3 (1990): 570–90.

by ongoing political and military upheavals. In 1578, Don Juan of Austria won the battle of Gembloux; Lipsius escaped to Antwerp barely in time, as the soldiers sacked his deserted house. Fortunately, Martin Del Rio, his Jesuit friend and an intimate of the Spanish Prince, was able to rescue his books and manuscripts. In 1579, Lipsius was offered a chair at the newly founded Calvinist University of Leiden. It was here, in 1584, that he published *De Constantia*, describing his fictitious encounter and conversation with Langius.

One of the bestsellers of the period, *De Constantia* appeared in more than forty-four Latin editions and in fifteen editions in French translation; it was further translated with great success into almost all European languages. All in all it went through over eighty editions between the end of the sixteenth century and the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

The fictive literary framework of this popular treatise highlights the fact that the main subject of Lipsius's discourse is not whether one should flee political troubles, but rather how a scholar can preserve the quality of constancy in facing a chaotic and corrupt political world.<sup>3</sup> Lipsius discerned that the light irony available to Erasmus and Thomas More, or the critical cynicism of Machiavelli in the early sixteenth century, were no longer possible at times when wars were declared, not for the greater glory of a prince but to secure the presence of the divine Word. A new mode of operation was required for the scholar in a political world where strict religious convictions could overcome rhetorical eloquence. In such a world, the concise, terse, and almost military style of Tacitus and Seneca would be preferable over the flowery style of Cicero.<sup>4</sup> The treatise was Lipsius's attempt to mold a new persona for the scholar, an ideal of maintaining composure while serving the king and the state even at the point of their most atrocious acts. Lipsius's main tenet and belief was that in the final account this political organization promises stability. The tensions between the self-possessed scholar and the affairs of the world inform

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<sup>2</sup> Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (ed. B. Oestreich and H. G. Koenigsberger; trans. D. McLintock; Cambridge, 1982), 13. This book gives an excellent account of *De Constantia* (13–27) and its place in Lipsius's political philosophy. For a portrayal of Lipsius's philology see Anthony Grafton, "Portrait of Justus Lipsius," in idem, *Bring Out Your Dead: The Past as Revelation* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), 227–43.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. John Sellars, "Justus Lipsius's *De Constantia*: A Stoic Spiritual Exercise," *Poetics Today* 28:3 (2007): 339–62.

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion in Adriana McCrea, *Constant Minds: Political Virtue and the Lipsian Paradigm in England, 1584–1650* (Toronto, 1997).

this treatise and structure it, presenting the Stoic ideal of constancy in a new light.<sup>5</sup>

The treatise begins when the young Lipsius arrives at his friend's house seeking counsel, desolated by "the troubles of the Low-countries," especially by the "insolencie of the gouvernours and soldiers" and the atrocities that had engulfed his homeland and his fellow countrymen. He cries to his friend in distress: "How should I not bee touched and tormented with the calamities of my countrey for my countreymens sake, who are tossed in this sea of adversities, and do perish by sundry misfortunes?"<sup>6</sup> In despair he turns to his friend: "Who is of so hard and flinty a heart that he can anie longer endure these euils?" For this reason Lipsius has decided to take to the road and journey to the imperial court in Vienna, seeking peace of mind there. On hearing these complaints, Langius uses the opportunity to initiate a discussion on the virtue of constancy as the essential human aptitude to face the chaotic world and its incomprehensible disasters. "Our mindes must be so confirmed and conformed, that we may bee at rest in troubles, and haue peace euen in the midst of warre."<sup>7</sup> While standing at the porch of Langius's house, Lipsius discusses with his friend questions of moral philosophy in an attempt to decide the course of life suitable for him.

Langius's main argument is that it is futile to wander the world seeking refuge from strife, and that Lipsius's emotions and distress are due to his unclear mind, ruled by mere opinions that result from human passions and affection and not from true reason.<sup>8</sup> Running away and changing one's circumstances is of no avail; inner bitterness and fears will continually haunt one's soul, leaving it restless and oppressed:

Doth not the sight of faire fields, riuers and mountains put a man out of his paines? It maybe they withdraw vs from them, but yet for a very short

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<sup>5</sup> See also the discussion of Stoic constancy in Jacqueline Lagrée, *Juste Lipse et la restauration du stoïcisme: Étude et traduction des traités stoïciens De la constance, Manuel de philosophie stoïcienne, Physique des stoïciens* (Paris, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Justus Lipsius, *De Constantia libri duo: qui alloquium praecipue continent in publicis malis* (4th ed.; Frankfurt, 1591). I use a contemporary English translation by Nathaniel Wanley, *Two Bookes of Constancie: Containing, principallie, A Comfortable Conference, in Common Calamities* (London, 1595).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2–3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 5: "For these mystes and cloudes that thus compasse thee, doe proceede from the smoake of OPINIONS . . . That bright beame of reason (I meane) which may illuminate the obscuritie of thy braine, . . . wee, who being sicke in our mindes doe without any fruite, wander from one countrey to another . . . Otherwise it is of olde festered affections, which holde their seat, yea & scepter in the castle of the mind."



time, and so to no good end . . . So it commeth to passe that these externall pleasures do beguile the mind, & vnder pretence of helping, doe greatly hurt vs . . . For thou shalt still finde an enimie about thee, yea euen in that closet of thine . . . Thou cariest warre with thee.<sup>9</sup>

The only cure is the right use of reason: "But vertue keepeth the meane, not suffering any excesse or defect in her actions, because it weigheth all things in the balance of Reason . . . Right Reason to be, *A true sense and iudgement of things humane and diuine*."<sup>10</sup> Right reason does not depend on sensory input, and has no need of external data; it rejects the external world in favor of inner tranquility and peace of mind.<sup>11</sup>

Storming and subduing the castle of opinion enables the true sage to withstand all external affliction, preserving fortitude and integrity: "Let showers, thunders, lighteninges, and tempestes fall round about thee, thou shalt crie boldlie with a loude voyce *I lie at rest amid the waues*."<sup>12</sup> The sage in possession of constancy is protected from the afflictions of the worthless external world and finds solace in the inner space of the human mind: "The causes of sorrow—I must touch the sore with my hande—things not in us but about us, doe not helpe nor hurte the inner man, that is the minde."<sup>13</sup>

The crux of Langius's argument is that one must eschew all softness in one's reactions to the sight of human misery, such as sighing, sobbing, and weeping, and must understand the nature of historical events as the result of divine Providence ("publike euilles are imposed vppon vs by God . . . they be necessarie and by destinie"); these calamities are profitable for us and are neither "grievuous, nor straunge."<sup>14</sup> Public sorrow and evils may seem without end or purpose, but they result, in reality, from higher forces:

For you knowe well that there is an eternall Spirite, whome wee call GOD, which ruleth, guideth and gouerneth the rolling Spheares of heauen, the manifolde courses of the Stars and Planets, the successiu alterations of the Elements, finally, al things whatsoeuer in heauen and earth. Thinkest thou that CHANCE or FORTUNE beareth any sway in this excellent frame of the world?<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 32.

Discerning the rule of divine Providence over the world does not lead the sage to seek an understanding of the manner in which this Providence expresses itself in the operations of the physical world. The laws that govern nature are beyond the ken of human ability because the world is a place of constant change and shifting images. Even the heavens are not stable and elude human efforts to know their motions and shape.<sup>16</sup>

Destiny and Providence rule the world but their reasons and laws are not available to human knowledge. "Euen so I thinke of destiny, which must be looked vnto; not into: and be credited, not perfectly known." And Langius concludes by admonishing young Lipsius "What appertaineth it vnto thee to enquire curiouslie of the libertie or thraldome (*servitus*) of our will?"<sup>17</sup>

This skeptical attitude, however, does not imply Langius's resignation from the world of action. On the contrary, he is resolute to translate constancy into an active involvement in worldly affairs.<sup>18</sup> Young Lipsius admits that there is "one tempestuous waue of a troubled imagination that tosseth me . . . if all publike euils come by Destenie, which cannot be constrained nor controlled, why then shall wee take anie care at all for our countrie? . . . Why doo wee not . . . sit still our selues with our handes in our bossomes?"<sup>19</sup> This is unacceptable in Langius's eyes, and when he tries to convince Lipsius that it is possible for the constant sage to take political responsibility, it becomes clear that the question is not merely moral but assumes an epistemological stance vis-à-vis the phenomenal world.

After advocating the Stoic principles of constancy as the only way to face a troubled world torn by religious strife and civil wars, principles that suggest an attitude of detachment, the question arises as to how one can then live an active civic life in the world. In order to disentangle this problem and to expound its ramifications for the constant sage, Langius invites the young Lipsius to visit his gardens. As in the works of earlier genera-

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 37–38: "And howsoeuer the wit of man cloaketh and excuseth these matters, yet there haue happened and daily do in that celestiall bodie such things as confound both the rules and wittes of the Mathematicians . . . But beholde our Astrologers were fore troubled of late with strange (*noui*) motions, and new stares. This very yeare there arose a star whose encreasing and decreasing was plainly marked, and we saw (a matter hardly to be credited [*difficulter creditum*]) euen in the heauen itself, a thing to haue beginning and end againe."

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 55–58.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 55.

tions of humanists, who invoked the classical trope of *locus amoenus*, the garden supplies a location that promotes an attentive study of the world, celebrating the particular over and against the scholastic insistence on essences and substantial forms. This conception was part of the new commitment of these scholars to the *vita activa* and their appreciation of the necessity of the scholar's involvement in the affairs of the world.

Conrad Celtis (1459–1508), in his answer to the critics of the humanist agenda, presented the natural world as a place most suitable for divine inspiration: “You wonder why I greedily seek bright fields and the hot sun? Here the great image of omnipotent Jove comes to meet me, and the highest temples of god. The woods please the muses, while the city is hostile to poets and full of the unhealthy crowd.”<sup>20</sup> Brian Ogilvie further notes Renaissance humanism's fascination with the way gardens present a splendid variety of forms and colors. Francesco Colonna, for instance, leads the hero of his fantastic allegory, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (*Poliphilo's Strife of Love in a Dream*, 1499), through woods and gardens, observing “most beautiful, varied, and rare botanical species, punctiliously listed.”<sup>21</sup>

This was a common practice amongst Renaissance humanists, combining technical aspects with a more poetic celebration of natural variety. Erasmus, as well as Rabelais, commended the study of natural particulars as conduit to a more comprehensive contemplation of the Creator. It is in this vein that Gargantua advises his son Pantagruel to devote himself to the study of the natural world and its entire variety.<sup>22</sup> Such study combined sensual pleasure with intellectual delight in a way that was supposed to expand one's spiritual wisdom:

Let him be a student and admirer of nature, so that from the contemplation and admiration of so many works of the Great Artificer . . . a pleasure of the mind is conjoined with the harmonious pleasure of all the senses. Then, I

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<sup>20</sup> *Miraris campos liquidos Phoebumque calentem/ me cupidum expetere./ Hic mihi magna Iovis subit omnipotentis imago,/ templaque summa dei./ Silva placet musis, urbs est inimica poetis/ et male sana cohors;* Conrad Celtis, “Ad Sepulchrum disdaemonem,” in *Lateinische Gedichte deutscher Humanisten* (ed. H. C. Schnur; Stuttgart, 1978), 42. Quoted and translated in Brian W. Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago, 2006), 106–7.

<sup>21</sup> Margherita Azzi Visentini, *L'Orto botanico di Padova e il giardino del Rinascimento* (Milan, 1984), 81–83. Quoted in Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing*, 108.

<sup>22</sup> François Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (trans. B. Raffel; New York, 1990), 58, 158. Quoted in Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing*, 110. One should note the irony of this passage and Rabelais's allusion to the study of natural variety as the study of “nothing.”

ask you, what delight will you find in the bounds of nature that could be more honest, greater, and more perfect in every respect?<sup>23</sup>

Other humanists considered the garden to be a place of relaxation, which could cure a sorrowful heart and purify the mind from constant cares and melancholy. In order to avoid the black bile, Ficino advocates the “frequent viewing of shining water and of green or red color, the haunting of gardens and groves and pleasant walks along rivers and through lovely meadows... but above all, of variety.”<sup>24</sup> This celebration of variety was associated with Venus, the goddess of love and external beauty, who Ficino mobilizes to balance the effects of Saturn, absorbed in internal depths: “[Venus] through her pleasure lures to external things, while [Saturn] through his, recalls us to the internal.”<sup>25</sup> At first it seems, then, that Langius follows these Renaissance sentiments and that he suggests a walk to the garden as a suitable medication for Lipsius’s moroseness and sadness: “the way is not farre, you shall exercise your bodie, and see the towne; Finallie, the aire is there pleasant and fresh.”<sup>26</sup>

Entrance to the garden is immediately signified by “a wandering curiositie” concerning the “elegancie and beautie of the place.”<sup>27</sup> Lipsius moves to poetic hyperbole and exclaims that other famous gardens are “no better than pictures of flies” (*imagines muscarum*); he continues that when “I... applied some of the flowers to my nose and eyes... This delight so tickleth and feedeth both my senses at once.” This sensual delight leads Lipsius to contemplate the heavenly realm as well as “the earth and her sacred treasures” and “the beautie of this inferior world.” The young Lipsius allows his “curious eie” to take control of his “cogitations” in celebrating “these gay and neat collours.”<sup>28</sup>

Similarly to Ficino, Lipsius, too, identifies the garden with Venus and the graces, emphasizing the senses of sight and smell as sources of the delight in the detailed variety of nature:

<sup>23</sup> Conrad Gessner, *De raris et admirandis herbis, quae sive quod noctu luceant, sive alia ob causas, Lunariae nominantur, Commentariolus* (Zurich, 1556), 48, 50. Quoted in Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing*, 113.

<sup>24</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life* (ed. and trans. C. V. Kaske and J. R. Clark; Binghamton, 1989), 135–37.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>26</sup> Lipsius, *Two Bookes of Constancie*, 58.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

God graunt me leaue (farre from all tumults of townes) to walk with a glad-some and wandering eie amid these hearbes and flowers of the knowne and unknown worlde so that my minde being beguiled with a kind of wandering retchlesnes, I may cast off the remembrance of all cares and troubles.<sup>29</sup>

The garden, then, supplies the scenery for a discussion of the way one should relate to the world in general and of the appropriate knowledge to seek, in particular. These questions, however, transform the garden into a place of anxiety, and its lively variety then becomes the source of a melancholic dread of vanity.<sup>30</sup> Langius reprimands Lipsius for admiring and actually doting on “this flourishing purple Nymph,” and cautions him that in admiring the garden’s externality he is “neglecting the true & lawful delights therof.”<sup>31</sup> The danger is that the curious and idle person will eventually become an “instrument of two foule vices, *Vanity* and *slouthfulness*.” The collector’s hunt after “strange hearbs and flowers” causes envy, grudge, and worse, a “heauier heart”; in short, it is a “merrie madnesse.”<sup>32</sup> Langius discards the slothful pleasures of the Epicurean garden, transforming it into a place for the Stoic sage’s *negotium animi*.<sup>33</sup> Beauty and delight are not to be shunned altogether, yet the scholar may indulge in such pursuits only under the strict censure of whether they are applied to “good vse and purpose,” and under the austere discipline of masculine reason.<sup>34</sup>

This garden scene precludes any investigation of nature as futile and vain. Knowledge is to be appreciated only insofar as it contributes to one’s constancy and self-possession. Observing nature lures the scholar’s attention to external variety and to nature’s seductive and unstable copiousness. *De Constantia* is a general rehearsal of Lipsius’s notion of *prudentia*

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>30</sup> See also Victor Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (trans. A.-M. Glasheen; Cambridge, 1997), 144–47. For a different interpretation, see Claudia Swan, *Art, Science, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Holland: Jacques de Gheyn II (1565–1629)* (Cambridge, 2005), 115–20. Swan, however, concentrates only on the opening chapter of the second book of *De Constantia* and thus reads this garden scene as a celebration of empirical investigation and as an embodiment of the new science.

<sup>31</sup> Lipsius, *Two Bookes of Constancie*, 64.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Morford, *Stoics and Neostoics: Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius* (Princeton, 1991), 165.

<sup>34</sup> Lipsius, *Two Bookes of Constancie*, 67–68: “Hast thou delighted in learning, & the companie of those nine sisters? I like it wel, knowing that by this lighter & pleasant kind of learning, the mind is prepared & made readie *not being fit before to receiue the sacred seed*. Howbeit I allow not that thou shouldest stay there . . . why I say ioyne we not to the firme food of Philosophy, with the sweet delicates of Orators and Poets? Mistake me not, I do not condemne these latter, but commend them in their place: and I would haue those loose wandering Nymphes to be brided (as I may say) by some seuerer *Bacchus*.”

*mixta*: wisdom that is directly applicable to practice. One is to avoid “vain philosophy” and to follow the example of Tacitus’s Agricola, who “kept backe and restrained his mind set on fire with a desire for learning, knowing it to be a very hard thing to hold a meane in wisdom.”<sup>35</sup> Vain philosophy is confronted and confounded by teaching (*doctrina*), which confers virtue by preparing the human mind to embrace true wisdom—that is, to put learning into practice.

Lipsius’s critique of the garden as a site of knowledge was not directed solely at the humanists’ general celebration of the natural world. His immediate target was the newly established University of Leiden and its faculty of medicine, whose hallmark was the empirical investigation of the natural world. The new university was established after Leiden, which supported William I of Orange (1533–1584) against the Habsburgs, had withstood the traumatic sieges laid by the Habsburgs’ troops, first at the end of 1573 and then from April to October 1574. The university was both a reward to the citizens of Leiden for their endurance and loyalty and a political maneuver by William to strengthen his hand in the peace negotiations in Breda (1575). From its foundation the university was at the heart of a religious debate.<sup>36</sup> The radical Calvinists aspired to configure the curriculum in accordance with their needs and to mold the university as a place for religious instruction for future pastors and clergymen. In opposition to the radical assault stood the curators of the university (appointed for life by the States of Holland and Zeeland) and the four burgomasters of Leiden, who protected religious tolerance and aspired to wider academic appeal and recognition. These sentiments drove the governors of the new school to invest much energy in their attempts to recruit famous scholars (such as Lipsius) and to establish a faculty of medicine as a bastion of nondogmatic investigation and study of creation. The dominant intellectual trend in the new faculty was Hippocratic, stressing keen observation, accurate descriptions of natural phenomena, and a practical orientation.

<sup>35</sup> Justus Lipsius, *Sixte bookes of politickes or ciuil doctrine* (trans. W. Jones; London, 1594), Book I, Chapter 10.

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed account of the founding of the University of Leiden see Maria Wilhelmina Jurriaanse, *The Founding of Leyden University* (trans. J. Brotherhood; Leiden, 1965). For the story of the siege see Robert Fruin, *The Siege and Relief of Leyden in 1574* (trans. E. Trevelyn; The Hague, 1927). See also the discussions of the intellectual and religious ambience in Leiden, in Harold J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven and London, 2007), 104–20; and Anthony Grafton, “Civic Humanism and Scientific Scholarship at Leiden,” in *Bring Out Your Dead*, 118–37.

The future physicians were expected to frequently be occupied in “examining, dissecting, dissolving, and transmuting the bodies of animals, vegetables, and minerals.”<sup>37</sup> This scientific agenda was embedded in two main projects associated with the faculty of medicine—the anatomy theatre and (especially) the establishment of a botanical garden. The significance of the botanical garden and the role it played in the newly established faculty of medicine were, from its inception, connected with political and moral aspects of being in the world.

Lipsius, an avid gardener himself, was implicated in the establishment of the garden, especially in the early phases of the negotiations between the university and the garden’s prospective curator, the famous botanist Carolus Clusius (Charles de l’Escluse, 1526–1609). The career of this famous botanist was an epitome of the Hippocratic creed, which preferred direct observation of as many particular plants as possible, celebrating the variety of nature and its infinite capacity to generate novelties.<sup>38</sup> Eschewing any overarching dogmatism, Clusius sought to meticulously differentiate between as many kinds of plants as possible that belonged to a single genus. By 1583, he had identified four kinds of mountain garlic, “most of which . . . [had] not yet been observed.” The Clusius-style botanist was supposed to travel and collect diverse specimens, noting the rare and the unknown. The titles of Clusius’s treatises repeatedly testify that their subject matter is the rare and exotic.<sup>39</sup> The botanist, moreover, was expected not only to describe and report on the various plants but to locate them in a variety of human and geographical environments. In the funeral oration that Edward Vorst composed for Clusius, the emphasis is on “direct acquaintance with the particulars of regions, peoples, topography, and local languages.”<sup>40</sup> Botanical investigation was an integral part of the humanist project, combining attentive visual inspection with antiquarian

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<sup>37</sup> Just Emile Kroon, *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van het geneeskundig onderwijs aan de Leidsche Universiteit, 1575–1625* (Leiden, 1911), 11–12. Quoted and translated in Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, 110.

<sup>38</sup> See the discussion of Clusius’s work in the intellectual context of Leiden University in Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, 93–132. See also Andrea Ubrizsy Savoia, *Papers Dealing with Carolus Clusius* (Rome, 1988); Leslie Tjon Sie Fat, “Clusius’s Garden: A Reconstruction,” in *The Authentic Garden: A Symposium on Gardens* (ed. L. Tjon Sie Fat and E. de Jong; Leiden, 1991), 3–12.

<sup>39</sup> Carolus Clusius, *Rariorum plantarum historia* (Antwerp, 1601); idem, *Exoticorum libri decem: quibus animalium, plantarum, aromatum, aliorumque peregrinorum fructuum historiae describuntur* (Leiden, 1605).

<sup>40</sup> Nancy G. Siraisi, “Oratory and Rhetoric in Renaissance Medicine,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65:2 (2004): 200.



and linguistic studies. When traveling, the botanist was expected to seek “not only natural things that grew there . . . but whatever pertained to the place, its antiquities, and the customs of the people.”<sup>41</sup>

Clusius’s assiduous observation of rare plants was embedded in mannerist sensibilities and fascination with bizarre novelties and curious objects. In 1573 he arrived in Vienna to become Maximilian II’s herbalist and plant collector. He held this capacity for the next fifteen years, becoming a major hub in a network of astronomers, alchemists, and humanist scholars in and around the Habsburg court.<sup>42</sup> In this mannerist ambience, Clusius enthusiastically pursued exotica and curiosities as the pinnacle of an active exploration of nature. When he finally arrived in Leiden in 1594, Clusius was exempted from teaching and was too old to actively tend the botanical gardens. These circumstances allowed him to dedicate his time to collecting the reports of travelers from around the globe and to translating many of them into Latin (amongst them, for instance, Thomas Harriot’s accounts of his travels to Virginia), acclimatizing exotic plants for European gardens and introducing new species of flowers and plants.

In Leiden, Clusius collaborated with the painter Jacob de Gheyn II in a series of accurate watercolor depictions of flowers. De Gheyn also engraved Clusius’s portrait (fig. 1), probably for inclusion in presentations of gift copies of his great book of 1601 *Rariorum plantarum historia*.<sup>43</sup> In this commemorative portrait, one may detect the resurfacing of Lipsius’s anxieties over the cultivation of natural variety in the botanical garden. Under the oval frame that surrounds the portrait of the elderly Clusius are a variety of exotic seeds such as peanuts, different pods, pine cones, and coral of the sea. These *naturalia* combine Clusius’s botanical activities with the attraction to curiosities and natural wonders that was embodied in his *Wunderkammer* in Leiden. While these emblematic items present Clusius’s work, the other items in the engraving suggest the epistemological apprehension associated with this fascination with shifting variety and ever-changing particularity. On both sides of Clusius’s portrait, two winged Naiads arise from intertwined cornucopias. “On their heads is a crown of piled up sea urchins (echinoderms), topped by a vase

<sup>41</sup> Edward Vorst, *Oratio funebris in obitum VN. et clarissimi Caroli Clusii*, bound with Charles L’Ecluse, *Curae posteriores* (Antwerp, 1611), 7; quoted in Siraisi, “Oratory and Rhetoric,” 200.

<sup>42</sup> See Robert J. W. Evans, *Rudolf II and his World* (rev. ed.; London, 1997), 119–24.

<sup>43</sup> On de Gheyn’s botanical sketches and drawings, see Swan, *Art, Science, and Witchcraft*, esp. 66–94; see also Florike Egmond, “Clusius, Cluyt, Saint Omer: The Origins of the Sixteenth-Century Botanical and Zoological Watercolours in the Libri Picturati A. 16–30,” *Nuncius: Journal of the History of Science* 20:1 (2005): 11–67.





Figure 1. Jacques de Gheyn the Younger, *Portrait of Clusius as an Old Man* (1600), by permission of Leiden University Library, BN 331.

with tulips and Turk's cap, lilies, and fritillaries."<sup>44</sup> The two nymphs are bare-breasted and exemplify the manner in which natural copiousness is metamorphosed into enticing mythological creatures. These nymphs may allude to Langius's reprimand of Lipsius for doting upon "this flourishing purple Nymph," when he admires the botanical abundance of his gardens. Just as the young Lipsius, in observing the minute details of flowers and rare plants, is carried away from true virtue, so the elderly Clusius's investigations and depictions of natural variety give rise to alluring nymphs and their attractions.

This impression is further assisted by the motto attached to Clusius's portrait: *Virtute et genio non nitimur: at mage CHRISTO Qui nobis istaec donat, et Ingenium* (We do not rely on Virtue and [inborn] Inclination, but rather on Christ who gives us these as well as Talent). In the frontispiece of the *Rariorum plantarum historia*, the motto, however, is mere *Virtute et Genio* (fig. 2), stressing humanistic aspiration and confidence. The portrait, with its motto, undermines the self-assurance Clusius expressed in the frontispiece of the book. The portrait depicts Clusius as a tormented and weary seventy-five years old, reviewing his life achievements while pointing at the futility of his scholarship. The study of nature *per se* cannot cultivate talent or virtue, and in the final account human toil is wholly dependent on divine will.

A similar lament on human vanity is depicted in de Gheyn's famous *Vanitas* (1603; fig. 3). The painting unites several emblems of human vanity. At the top are Heraclitus and Democritus: one philosopher weeps and the other laughs at human vanity. The motto, inscribed in the capstone of the arch, reads *Humana Vana* (Human Vanities); the two coins at the bottom left and right, showing the obverse and reverse sides of a Spanish coin, minted to commemorate the Habsburg Emperor, Charles V, and his mother, Joanna of Aragon and Castile (Queen Joanna the Mad). A skull presides over all these, symbolizing the theme of temporality and emphasizing that all things must pass, even powerful and mighty kings. In de Gheyn's material world, where everything changes (Heraclitus), or where all is merely atoms (Democritus), human endeavor is pointless. Above the skull a concave spherical mirror reflects vague images, stressing that human experience of the world, and especially visual experience, is nothing but a cluster of phantasms and vain imaging. On the two

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<sup>44</sup> Catalogue of an exhibition on the quatercentenary of Clusius's death, 4 April 2009: *The Exotic World of Carolus Clusius (1526–1609)* (ed. K. van Ommen; Leiden, 2009), 16.

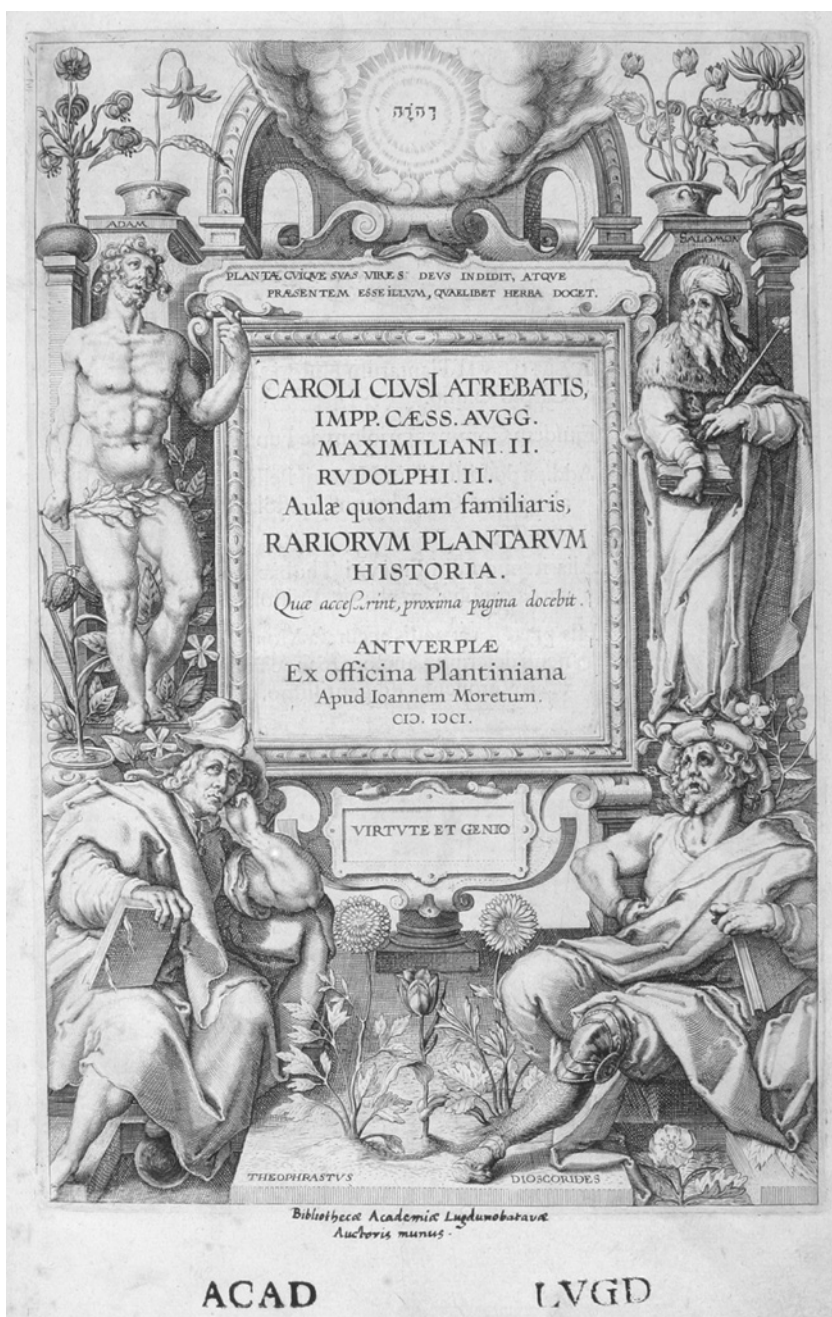


Figure 2. Title page of Carolus Clusius, *Rariorum Plantarum Historia* (1601), by permission of Leiden University Library, 661 A 3.





Figure 3: Jacques de Gheyn the Younger, *Vanitas Still Life* (1603), by permission of the Metropolitan Museum, New York. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.

sides of the skull appear two objects that usually symbolize ephemeral existence—vapors rising from a small phial and a flower in a vase. The flower, however, is a tulip, emphatically associated with Clusius who was instrumental in introducing the flower to the Netherlands.<sup>45</sup> The tulip is then an emblem of both the human search for knowledge of the natural world and its limitations, constrained as it is to shifting appearances and momentary images. The manner in which the painting elevates the tulip as the epitome of late Renaissance natural history, together with the allusions to false images and melancholic fantasies (i.e., of Queen Joanna the Mad) denotes the intricate relationship between the faculty of imagination, visual experience, and knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

De Gheyn further exhibits these interdependences of fantasy and detailed observation of *naturalia* in a sketch depicting a meticulously executed drawing of a crab against a series of fantastical figures of the netherworld. The viewer of this page gets the notion that these two instances belong together—that in order to depict imaginary creatures one must rely on the same pictorial procedures that enabled the naturalistic depiction of the crab; and that in order to both divulge the signification of the crab (a symbol of witchcraft and waywardness) and blend the different stains of color into a single coherent image one must fall back on the powers of the imagination.<sup>47</sup> The fascination with natural particulars and with meticulous and accurate observation was subjected to poignant moral criticism by Lipsius and his Neostoic followers and was accompanied with anxieties over the demarcation between fantastical images and real experiences. Looking at de Gheyn's drawings and paintings, it appears that the only way out of the lure of vanity is Lipsius's commendation to turn away from outward appearances in favor of the cultivation of inner constancy.

<sup>45</sup> For the cultural significance of tulips, see Anne Goldgar, "Nature as Art: The Case of the Tulip," in *Merchants and Marvels: Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe* (ed. P. H. Smith and P. Findlen; New York and London, 2002), 324–46.

<sup>46</sup> See also the discussion of De Gheyn's painting in Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in 17th Century Dutch Still-Life Painting* (Chicago and London, 2005), 137–44.

<sup>47</sup> Swan interprets this sketch differently. I concur, however, with Francesca Fiorani's comment that Swan separates "what de Gheyn ostensibly saw related"; review of Swan, *Art, Science, and Witchcraft, Renaissance Quarterly* 60:1 (2007): 217.

*Imagination and the "Great Constancy" of the New Science*

This strict and narrow conception of knowledge with its severe discipline of the imagination and suppression of any passion attracted many in the late sixteenth century, as the appropriate key to political life.<sup>48</sup> The inner tensions and contradictions, however, between involvement in the world and the scholar's pose of resignation was not solved, and led to further critique of the relevance of wisdom and science to human life. The question of the proper hierarchy of the human cognitive faculties and the relationship between them loomed large over late sixteenth-century western European culture.<sup>49</sup> This was not a mere abstract philosophical pursuit, but had immediate relevance to the way one was supposed to manage both public and private life. The role and validity of sensory perceptions; the function of the imagination; and its ability to present the mind with a way to peer beyond material immediacy into the unknown, probing the limits of human knowledge—all these were concerned with mental health and with the control of the passions and the hegemony of reason over the other faculties. It is in a different natural scenario, this time not a cultivated garden but a wild wood, that another late sixteenth-century writer examines these issues, questioning the ability of reason to control the imagination and subjugate the passions.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare transports Neostoic convictions into the woods of Athens, where he critically examines the ineffectiveness of these convictions as rigid moral and epistemological guides. The woods in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, are "not a paradise, a heaven of romance and bliss; it is a place of queasy shifts and disturbing fantasies, capricious and tyrannical in its own way . . . of total absurdity."<sup>50</sup> The woods set the limits to the beliefs of Theseus (the duke of Athens) in the rational flow of time and in the power of reason to turn, by his decree,

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<sup>48</sup> See for instance the impact of Lipsian ideas on the political life in England of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries: Robert C. Evans, *Jonson, Lipsius, and the Politics of Renaissance Stoicism* (Durango, 1992); A. A. Bromham, "'Have you read Lipsius?'" Thomas Middleton and Stoicism," *English Studies* 77:5 (1996): 401–21; and Adriana McCreia, *Constant Minds*. For the general vogue of Stoicism in early modern English culture, see Gilles D. Monsarrat, *Light from the Porch: Stoicism and English Renaissance Literature* (Paris, 1984); and John H. M. Salmon "Stoicism and Roman Example: Seneca and Tacitus in Jacobean England," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50:2 (1989): 199–225.

<sup>49</sup> See especially Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Colin McGinn, *Shakespeare's Philosophy: Discovering the Meaning behind the Plays* (New York, 2006), 21.

melancholy into mirth, and violence into love.<sup>51</sup> Theseus's reason, however, has no grounding: it is indifferent to sensory evidence and distrustful of the imagination, seeing this as a shifting and unstable element that disrupts the political order. In the midst of his preparations for the wedding ceremony, Theseus is faced with the demand of a father (Egeus) to cause his daughter (Hermia) to obey his will and to force her to marry the man he has chosen for her, rather than the man she loves. In judging this demand, Theseus has no recourse to any external visual data, as the two men are similar in appearance. The daughter, Hermia, begs him to view the situation from a different perspective, an act that necessarily requires that Theseus distinguish between the two suitors by imagining a different point of view: "I would my father looked but with my eyes."<sup>52</sup> The only answer the duke can give her to fend off her plea for an imaginary viewpoint is the arbitrariness of her father's judgment and the legal power of tradition: "Rather your eyes must with his judgment look," and "question your desires." This struggle between "cool reason" and the claim to a new kind of knowledge suggested by one's fantasy is transported into a nightly adventure in the woods. Here the confrontation between legendary figures and their whims confronts the participants' convictions and common sense, ridiculing their ordinary visual notions of "things as they seem." Within the forest the protagonists and the spectators come to realize that the play is not about a struggle between oppressive reason and the realm of passions and unruly fancy, but a bold attempt to reform reason:<sup>53</sup>

Reason and love keep little company together nowadays.  
The more the pity that some honest neighbours will  
not make them friends.<sup>54</sup>

In hearing the four lovers' confused reports upon their adventures, Hippolyta forces Theseus to reevaluate his Neostoic beliefs in the clear separation between rational and rigorous bearing and the realm of fantasy and desire, between the rigidity of a uniform and consistent law and the playful variety of nature: "Tis strange, my Theseus, that these lovers

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<sup>51</sup> Theseus thus appears in the opening dialogue with Hippolyta (I. i. 1–19). For an extensive interpretation of this dialogue, see David Marshall, "Exchanging Visions: Reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *English Literary History* 49:3 (1982): 543–75, esp. 548–50.

<sup>52</sup> Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I. i. 56.

<sup>53</sup> See also the discussion of the play in Marjorie B. Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: From Metaphor to Metamorphosis* (New Haven and London, 1974), 59–87.

<sup>54</sup> Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, III. i. 144–147.

speak of.”<sup>55</sup> His immediate answer is a Stoic critique of the lover’s Platonic poetic madness as a vision that is “more strange than true,” a confused amalgam of “antique fables” and “fairy toys.” Their story, claims Theseus, is the result of “seething brains,” and one can trust only “cool reason” to detach one’s mind from their “fine frenzy.”<sup>56</sup> In reply, Hippolyta invites Theseus to reconsider his precepts and to follow a new mode of imaginary witnessing, towards a new sort of knowledge and constancy:<sup>57</sup>

But all the story of the night told over,  
And all their minds transfigured so together,  
More witnesseth than fancy’s images  
And grows to something of *great constancy*,  
But, howsoever, strange and admirable.

Theseus has to set aside his old convictions and to adopt a new cognitive economy: since the senses cannot be trusted and perception is so often easily distorted, reason must turn to fantasy and to the passions that ignite this psychological faculty in order to accommodate the variety of nature. It is not rhetorical eloquence, nor the unrelenting Stoic judgment that enables an accurate interpretation of the phenomenal world, but an emotive stance informed by one’s ability to imagine what is hidden beneath external silence:<sup>58</sup>

Out of this silence yet I picked a welcome  
and in the modesty of a fearful duty  
I read as much as from the rattling tongue  
Of saucy and audacious eloquence.  
Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity  
In least speak most, to my capacity.

If our perceptions are mere fleeting shadows, only by use of the imagination can meaning be rescued: “The best in this kind are but shadows, and The worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.”<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., V. i. 1–2.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., V. i. 3–13.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., V. i. 23–27.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., V. i. 100–105.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., V. i. 212–13. In my view, Shakespeare critically examines the Stoic and Skeptic modes of thought and action not in order to embrace them but to find a way of overcoming them. This conception runs counter to most interpretations of Shakespearean philosophy; cf. Thomas McAlindon, *Shakespeare’s Tragic Cosmos* (Cambridge, 1991); Millicent Bell, *Shakespeare’s Tragic Skepticism* (New Haven, 2002); David Bevington, *Shakespeare’s Ideas: More Things in Heaven and Earth* (Chichester, 2008).



The question of this new cognitive economy looms over the discussions concerning the “new science” and its vicissitudes in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Recognizing that “it is a false assertion that the sense of man is the measure of things,”<sup>60</sup> leads Francis Bacon (1565–1629), for instance, to reframe the proceedings of scientific investigation. Bacon offers a method precisely as a way of controlling the distorting presence of that “individual who mingles self with observation.” The method’s conceptual shifting of “the role of the observer from mere recorder to active shaper” of experience ends up, however, in calling even more attention to “the mediated character of observation.”<sup>61</sup> The fundamental insight for Bacon is that the senses are the main source of distortion, and in following them the investigator of nature will go astray in a “labyrinth” of shifting images. The “uncertain light of the sense” leads the “eye of the human understanding” to perceive merely a confused variety, only to wander aimlessly in “the woods of experience and particulars.”<sup>62</sup>

The natural world, like Shakespeare’s woods or Lipsius’s garden, appears in many perplexing forms that bewilder the observer, leading to intellectual chimeras. The senses supply only limited and superficial knowledge of the world. Bacon compares the ancient practice of mariners, who could sail near the shore only by observation of the stars, to the manner in which “discoveries which have been hitherto made in the arts and sciences are such as might be made by practice, meditation, observation, argumentation—for they lay near to the senses, and immediately beneath common notions.” And just as men using the mariner’s compass managed to traverse the ocean, so if one wishes to “reach the remoter and more hidden parts of nature, it is necessary that a more perfect use and application of the human mind and intellect be introduced.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, in *Francisci de Verulamio, summi Angliae cancellarij instauratio magna* (London, 1620), Aphorism 41:57: “Falso enim asseritur, Sensum humanum esse Mensuram rerum.”

<sup>61</sup> See for instance, Andrew Barnaby and Lisa J. Schnell, *Literate Experience: The Work of Knowing in Seventeenth-Century English Writing* (New York, 2002), esp. 6; James Paradis, “Montaigne, Boyle, and the Essay of Experience,” in *One Culture: Essays in Science and Literature* (ed. G. Levine; Madison, 1987), esp. 70; Ronald Levao, “Francis Bacon and the Mobility of Science,” *Representations* 40 (1992): esp. 8, 13.

<sup>62</sup> Bacon, *Instauratio magna*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, Viscount St Alban, and Lord High Chancellor of England* (ed. J. Spedding, R. L. Ellis, and D. D. Heath; 15 vols.; London, 1857–1874), 4:18.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

Bacon gives little weight “to the immediate and proper perception of the sense.”<sup>64</sup> The only way to correct perception is to discipline the senses through artificial means for the encounter with nature: “to provide helps to the sense—substitutes to supply its failures, rectification to correct its errors, that the office of sense shall be only to judge of the experiment, and that experiment itself will judge the thing.”<sup>65</sup> The true motions that govern the natural world are invisible, and a new mode for observing them is required.<sup>66</sup> In order to observe nature’s strange and wonderful works, Bacon’s reason must mobilize the affections and use the faculty of imagination to observe these invisible motions. In order to achieve this, a new moral philosophy is to be formulated that will “procure the affections to obey reason, and not invade it.” The new philosopher of nature should utilize rhetorical and poetical devices such as ancient fables and myths in order to “fill the imagination to second reason, and not to oppress it.”<sup>67</sup> In finding the correct way to portray the world the imagination is transformed into reason’s main tool for the acquisition of knowledge: “In all persuasions that are wrought by eloquence and other impressions of nature, which do paint and disguise the true appearance of things, the chief recommendation unto Reason is from the Imagination.”<sup>68</sup>

Bacon’s proposal suggests a precarious and dangerous balance between the aspirations of reason and the misrule and devious conduct of human passions and imagination. Other early modern natural philosophers hoped to neutralize these psychological elements and to avoid altogether the epistemological hazards involved in applying the imagination to the processes of knowledge production. Galileo in his polemics with the Jesuits over the nature of the comets blames his adversaries for following “the strength of their passions,” and for failing to notice that “the contradiction of geometry is the bald denial of truth.”<sup>69</sup> The natural philosopher has to be vigilant and avoid being trapped by “the bounty of nature in producing her effects.”<sup>70</sup> Galileo put his trust in the telescope and in the discipline it enforces on the observer as a tool to filter out any imaginary and fictitious impressions. However, Copernican astronomers soon realized that

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum; or A Naturall Historie* (London, 1626), 31–32.

<sup>67</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 3:387.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 382.

<sup>69</sup> Galileo Galilei, *The Assayer*, in *The Controversy on the Comets of 1618* (ed. and trans. S. Drake and C. D. O’Malley; Philadelphia, 1960), 164.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 252.

the only way to convey the notion of the earth's motion to the general public involved the employment of poetic imagination and fancy, and like Hermia's supplication that her father might view the world through her own eyes, so Kepler contends that the different features of the terrestrial-based universe are relative to the position of the spectator and "exist only in the imagination of the earth-dwellers. Hence, if we transfer the imagination to another sphere, everything must be understood in a different form."<sup>71</sup>

In his *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, Galileo goes even further, assessing the imagination and its fantasies as a necessary point of departure for his new science. When Simplicio protests that the motions described by the Copernicans are "bald denial of manifest sense," he contends that "if the senses ought not to be believed, by what other portal shall we enter into philosophizing?"<sup>72</sup> In answer, Sagredo suggests that the new portal is our faculty of imagination: "There has just occurred to me a certain fantasy which passed through my imagination . . . perhaps it may be of some help in explaining how this motion . . . remains as if nonexistent."<sup>73</sup> Sagredo's fantastic tale of the pen connected to the sailing ship capable of drawing its path upon the rolling waves is meaningful only due to the mathematical explanation that follows, in the same manner in which Kepler's dream of lunar journeys and daemons requires a mathematical apparatus of footnotes and explanations to save it from becoming a melancholic delusion.

This belief in the power of mathematics to discipline imagination was shared by René Descartes. He, like Galileo and Kepler before him, recognized that one should apply the imagination in order to launch an investigation into the hidden structure of the universe.<sup>74</sup> At the beginning of his treatise on light, Descartes radically disconnects human sensations from external reality. He points to "a difference between the sensation that we have of it [light], that is, the idea that we form of it in our imagination

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<sup>71</sup> Johannes Kepler, *Kepler's Somnium: The Dream or Posthumous Work on Lunar Astronomy* (trans. E. Rosen; Madison, 1967; repr. New York, 2003), 85. See also Raz Chen-Morris, "Shadows of Instruction: Optics and Classical Authorities in Kepler's *Somnium*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66:2 (2005): 223–43.

<sup>72</sup> Galileo Galilei, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems, Ptolemaic and Copernican* (trans. S. Drake; Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), 171.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> For an extensive treatment of the role of the imagination in Descartes's philosophy see Dennis L. Sepper, *Descartes's Imagination: Proportion, Images, and the Activity of Thinking* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996); see also Peter Galison, "Descartes's Comparisons: From the Invisible to the Visible," *Isis* 75:2 (1984): 311–26.

through the intermediary of our eyes, and what it is in the objects that produces the sensation in us.”<sup>75</sup> Descartes moves on to a thorough critique of human sense perception and concludes that he has no compelling argument that the ideas one has bear any necessary resemblance to the objects from which they proceed.

Building on this assertion, he examines the major sensory impressions (sound, sight, and touch) and points out that none of these can serve as an indicator of the real composition and state of material objects. Any act of generalization or abstraction from the particularity of sensory experiences, then, involves an act of imaginative fabrication. The question is, what in these cognitive acts of imagination can serve as a point of departure for one's search for truth? In order to form a secure epistemological basis, Descartes embraces *motion* as the most basic and undeniable element in nature.<sup>76</sup>

Observing a natural phenomenon such as fire one can imagine many different things; however, only one element in fire is deemed necessary, and that is motion. Our sensations are diverse and are divorced from cognition proper and are more for our self-preservation than for knowledge. The corporeal ideas formed in our imagination do not correspond to the things of the world and there is no necessity for mental ideas to resemble the mechanical signals received in the sensory organs.

In the first five chapters of *Le Monde*, following this critique of the human senses, Descartes presents the basic and necessary facts of nature: only motion exists in the experienced things; the parts of matter are in motion and this is enough to explain such sensations as heat and light in fire; all macroscopic objects are comprised of minute, invisible, and mobile parts; all space is filled, and motion in such a plenum is possible only if adjoining bodies also move; the senses can perceive only the changes in such motions; the three elements of fire, air, and earth, are differentiated by the size of their particles.

The question Descartes is facing now is how to account for the variety of phenomena one perceives on the basis of these meager factors. Since the senses are unreliable for furnishing the mind with a fuller

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<sup>75</sup> René Descartes, *The World and Other Writings* (trans. S. Gaukroger; Cambridge, 1998), 3.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: “Someone else may if he wishes imagine the ‘form’ of fire, the quality of ‘heat,’ and the action of burning to be very different things in wood. For my part, I am afraid of going astray if I suppose there to be in the wood anything more than what I see must necessarily be there, so I am satisfied to confine myself to conceiving the motion of its parts.”

account of external events, Descartes has to summon the faculty of imagination in order to conceive a new science. In the contorted sentences of this summons, the reader can sense Descartes's discomfort at leaving the sure grounds of deductive reasoning for the unstable philosophical imagination:

Many other things remain for me to explain here, and for my own part I would be happy to add a number of other arguments to make my opinions more plausible. But so as to make this long discourse less boring for you, I want to wrap up part of it in the guise of a fable, in the course of which I hope the truth will not fail to manifest itself sufficiently clearly. For a while, then, allow your thought to wander beyond this world to view another, wholly new, world, which I call forth in imaginary spaces before it.<sup>77</sup>

Space thus becomes a product of the imagination, and through these imaginary spaces the motion of cogitation can produce different figures and replicas of local motion. There is no limit to the possibilities to be drawn from the imagination itself. The control over this variety has to come from the understandings that initially provided the philosopher with the basic constants in this imaginary space. The philosopher can be certain of God's providence and immutability, which guarantees the law of inertia, and that motion is only local. The intellect directs the creative activity by recognizing that certain fundamental laws governing extension and motion have been laid down by God. The imagination constrained by these fundamental divine decrees can fathom and conjure up a *phantasia* that will in essence be a truthful account of the world. Descartes's fable imitates the physical world as one experiences it, because the human faculty of imagination shares the same structural characteristic: the motions of the fantastic products of the imagination are identical in nature with the motions of the world, and through these motions the imagination also constructs spatial extensions, as these motions establish all the figures of geometry.<sup>78</sup> It is through the imagination that the philosopher of nature may decipher God's creation: "Since everything I propose here can be imagined distinctly, it is certain that even if there were nothing of this sort in the old world, God can nevertheless create it in a new one; for it is certain that He can create everything we imagine."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 24.

*The Sage Departs the Garden:  
The Correspondence between Descartes and Princess Elizabeth*

Descartes's emphasis is on the ability to imagine something distinctly as a necessary prerequisite of scientific knowledge, and he believed that the practice of mathematics would supply the necessary tools to achieve such controlled fantasies. This precarious relationship between the imagination and the rational mind became the central focus in Descartes's later philosophy.<sup>80</sup> In the *Meditations*, for instance, the imagination is relegated to a subsidiary role, yet the whole scenery of the *Meditations* (and especially the *First Meditation*) is set by acts of imagination: from the author's pondering his presence by the fireplace through imagining the madman's experience of the world and retrieving his dreams; to imagining a deceiving God; and to fantasizing a malignant demon. Thus, while the *Meditations* attempts to distinguish clearly between the realm of the soul and the realm of sensation and imagination, the outcome is that in order for the soul to contemplate its own nature it has to rely on the functions of the imagination.

In the earlier phases of his philosophical endeavor, Descartes relied on the ability of mathematics to provide the key to this intricate relationship between the mind's spiritual domain and the image-producing faculties. In order to direct the mind, Descartes recommends in the *Geometry* that "it is good to practice the rules for a long time on easy and simple questions such as those of mathematics." This simple rational exercise may have sufficed for Descartes and his self-fashioning as a man of solitude, dedicating himself to his scientific and philosophical inquiries away from human meddling.<sup>81</sup>

Descartes reinstates the garden as a place for intimate discussions that instruct the mind in the truth. In his unfinished dialogue *La Recherche de la Vérité par la Lumière Naturelle* ("The Search for Truth by Means of the Natural Light"), Descartes has the protagonist Eudoxus visited in his country home by two friends.<sup>82</sup> Both interlocutors are anxious about

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Marleen Rozemond, "The Nature of the Mind," in *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes's Meditations* (ed. S. Gaukroger; Oxford, 2006), 48–66; and see *Descartes's Changing Mind* (ed. P. Machamer and J. E. McGuire; Princeton, 2009), esp. 164–241.

<sup>81</sup> For Descartes's utilization of mathematics as a spiritual exercise, see Matthew L. Jones, *The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago, 2006) 15–53; Zeno Vendler, "Descartes's Exercises," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 19:2 (1989): 193–224.

<sup>82</sup> Descartes, "The Search for Truth," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch; 3 vols.; Cambridge, 1984), 2:401.

knowledge. While the young Polyander is eager to learn and is worried by his ignorance, the older scholar Epistemon perceives the desire for knowledge as an incurable illness tormenting humanity to no avail. Eudoxus does not fret about such concerns, since there is no malady for which nature has not provided us with its cure: "Each land has enough fruits and rivers to satisfy the hunger and thirst of all its inhabitants, so too I think that enough truth can be known in each subject to satisfy amply the curiosity of orderly souls."<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, Eudoxus declares that he has managed to conquer his own insatiable curiosity, and being content with the knowledge he has attained, has achieved true tranquility.<sup>84</sup> In Eudoxus, Descartes reestablishes the ideal of a disengaged sage, supplementing the Stoic moral instruction with his famous method of doubt. With powerful Cartesian tools Eudoxus dispels his colleagues' epistemological worries. His clear and distinct principle of the thinking subject satisfies Polyander's curiosity concerning his deep metaphysical queries pertaining to the Deity, the rational soul, and the moral issue of "the virtues and their rewards." Eudoxus is also able to counter Epistemon's concern over the nature of illusions and over human ability to differentiate truth from fiction.

As the dialogue evolves Eudoxus executes a paradoxical maneuver where radical doubt turns into the foundation of inquiry after certainty and truth. The dialogue then ends with Polyander's request to dwell upon the notion of a "thinking thing" (*être pensant*) as the basis for deeper speculations that "would take whole days to unfold." This invitation is retracted abruptly as Polyander starts to clarify this notion: "By a 'thinking thing,' I mean..."—but Descartes never allows him to conclude the definition.<sup>85</sup>

A few years later, Descartes met the exiled Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia whose life was delineated by the personal tragedies of the Thirty Years War. This meeting and the lengthy correspondence that ensued forced Descartes to complete his fictive dialogue. Only this time, in sharp contrast to the literary dialogues of Lipsius and his Neostoic followers, it became a lively dialogue tackling directly the question of the way one should be in the world.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 402.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 420.



Elizabeth opens their philosophical exchange on May 6, 1643, with the request that the philosopher satisfy her passion to share in his philosophical conversation and heal her soul. It is in this medical context, calling upon Descartes to observe the Hippocratic Oath, that she directs her critique at the heart of the *Meditations*' problematic; how, she asks, can the soul of a human being (it being only a thinking substance) determine the bodily spirits, in order to bring about voluntary actions?<sup>86</sup> The crucial difficulty Elizabeth detects in the *Meditations* is the manner in which the different faculties of the human mind are held to relate to one another. This problem threatens Descartes's philosophical project, and not only in regard to the mind–body problem. If one accepts Descartes's assertions that the soul is completely disassociated from corporeal images and stimulations, the utility of mathematics as a spiritual exercise is undermined.

Descartes's first answer attempts to bypass the medical framework and to give a simple solution to Elizabeth's query. The manner in which the soul operates in one's body does not demand much pondering. It is normal, so Descartes flatters the princess, to see "superhuman discourse emerging from a body so similar to those painters give to angels." He proceeds to reassert the fundamental distinction between the two aspects of the human soul: the one, that it thinks; and the other, that it is united to the body. From this distinction ensues a simple scheme: the "primitive notions" of the body comprise extensions, from which follow the notions of shape and movement; and those of the soul include thought, "the perceptions of the understanding," and human volition. The way these act upon one another is to be understood in the same way that "heaviness" pulls a body downward and not in "the way one body is moved by another."<sup>87</sup>

This answer does not satisfy Elizabeth, both on account of its inherent philosophical weakness, and especially because it does not address the issue of philosophical instruction on how one is to be in the social world. She opens her letter of June 10, 1643, by waving away Descartes's compliments and describing her difficult situation surrounded by courtly manners and hypocrisy.<sup>88</sup> Obligated to take part in the business of her

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<sup>86</sup> Lisa Shapiro (ed. and trans.), *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes* (Chicago, 2007), 62.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 64–66.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 67: "You attempted to console me . . . with false praise . . . [M]y upbringing in a place where the ordinary way of conversing has accustomed me to understand that people are incapable of giving one true praise, not made me presume that I could not err in believing the contrary of what people speak."



household and the politics of her family, she finds that she does not have “enough time . . . to acquire a habit of meditation in accordance with your [Descartes’s] rules.” How can one, under such circumstances, envisage the soul as an independent entity contemplating itself without any recourse to external events? How can Descartes’s abstract philosophical assertion that the relationship of the immaterial soul to the human body is like the relation of “heaviness” to a descending physical object explain that societal obligations “beat down so heavily on this weak mind with annoyance and boredom”? Elizabeth further points out that Descartes is using the quality of “heaviness,” which in other places he proved to be false human imagining, and that bodies fall because of mechanical causes and not for qualitative reasons. Thus, his image turns out not only to be a bad analogy but also underlines a metaphysical muddle involved in assuming that an immaterial entity can operate on a material substance. But the crucial difficulty that makes Elizabeth so wary is the precariousness of reason, as the soul “after having had the faculty and custom of reasoning well, can lose all of this by some vapors.”<sup>89</sup>

Descartes cannot ignore these queries, but he still attempts to wave them off, elaborating on the simple scheme he has already presented. In this new psychological economy, each part of one’s experience of self and of surroundings is perceived by a different cognitive faculty. While one can know the body and the soul separately through the understanding, their union may be “known only obscurely” by the higher mental faculties, yet “very clearly by the senses.”<sup>90</sup> The union of body and soul is therefore not an intellectual matter and it is better not to ponder it too much. Descartes diagnoses Elizabeth’s problem as the inability to conceive both the separateness of soul and body and their union; he asserts that brooding over this difficulty upsets the princess’s mind, making her anxious over her ability to keep her reason aloof from bodily processes. Descartes’s advice is to dedicate only a few hours per year to “metaphysical thoughts which exercise the pure understanding”; only a few hours per day to “the study of mathematics, which exercises principally the imagination”; and all the rest of one’s time to relaxing the senses and resting the mind. In dedicating most of one’s day to “ordinary conversation,” one may abstain from meditating and exert the imagination—and thus one gains an immediate experience of the union of the soul and the body.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 69.

In keeping away from serious conversations and “the bother of life” one may dedicate one’s time to studies. For this reason, Descartes himself had retired to the country, in order to be able to contemplate the contents of his soul independently from his studies of the mathematical disciplines, and to experience their union with no threat to either of his mental faculties. It is enough to understand the nature of the soul once in a lifetime, and there is no need to return to such contemplations over and over again. “The best is to content oneself in retaining in one’s memory and in one’s belief the conclusions that one has at one time drawn from such [metaphysical] meditations.”<sup>91</sup> Absorbing oneself in lofty metaphysical musing is harmful, and Descartes advises the princess to concentrate on those studies that pertain to the imagination and the senses. In these passages, Descartes accepts the Stoic ideal of tranquility; contra to Lipsius, however, he does not believe this ideal can be obtained within the social realm, but only in solitude, away from the “bothers of life” and their demands.

Descartes’s attempt to avoid any deeper intellectual account of the relationship between mind and body leaves Elizabeth near frustration. As she points out, the senses teach us nothing. If supreme knowledge of the union between soul and body can be attained only through worldly experience and reliance on sensory impressions then why is the best ambience to come to such knowledge in solitary life, away from human affairs? Descartes’s reliance on daily experience as the venue through which to perceive the union of body and soul “could perhaps overturn” his “*metaphysical meditations*”; and then the doubt and skepticism that earlier seemed to have been vanquished by Descartes’s proof of the “nonextendedness of the soul” may creep back in. The main difficulty, Elizabeth shrewdly indicates, is that in avoiding a fully-fledged intellectual account, the union of body and soul remains indistinct and obscure; that is, a denial of Descartes’s chief methodological principle.

Descartes tackles the issue of clear and distinct notions as prerequisite to any inquiry by offering Elizabeth a geometrical problem as a spiritual exercise; this exercise, he suggests, will train her mind to the attentiveness needed to perceive the crucial elements that bear upon one’s search for truth from the variety of experiences. The purpose of considering the problem of three circles (Apollonius’s problem) is not to find the right answer, a process that will “exercise one’s patience for laborious calculations,” but to grasp the “keys” to algebra that can “cultivate or

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 71.

entertain the mind.”<sup>92</sup> Indeed, Descartes’s explanation of his algebraic method serves Elizabeth, as she confesses, to see the problem clearly, and to arrive at, not a particular solution, but a general theorem. The princess’s success in solving the problem brings Descartes much pleasure, and for a moment it seems to him that Elizabeth might proceed along the sure path of algebra into the intricacies of metaphysical reasoning.

Descartes’s expectations, however, were soon frustrated. In the spring of 1645, he received news that the princess had been taken ill. Expressing his concern, he diagnoses Elizabeth’s malady as a result of the ill fortune that has persecuted her family. To heal such maladies, Descartes embraces a Stoic remedy and suggests that the princess rely on “the force of your virtue” to content her soul, “despite the disfavor of fortune.”<sup>93</sup> Virtue is explicitly interpreted as the control of reason over the passions and the troublesome imagination. The vulgar are subjected to the contingency of their passions; whereas the reasoning of the great souls is “so strong and so powerful” that it always remains mistress of their emotions. The balance between the affect of the body and the majestic immortal soul is maintained through continual action of the intellectually informed imagination. Detached from its bodily surroundings, the great soul views this life as “events in comedies.” Putting life on a stage allows the great souls to convert “even afflictions” to “serve them and contribute to the perfect felicity which they can enjoy already in this life.”<sup>94</sup>

In relating to the body as a theatrical event, the sage can endure physical pain patiently, assist friends in need, and accomplish all this in full knowledge of fulfilling his virtuous duty. Guiding the imagination to observe that “which is right under her,” the princess will be able to assess those good things she possesses “which can never be taken away from her . . . and see all the reasons she has to be content with them.”<sup>95</sup>

In her response, Elizabeth succinctly criticizes this Neostoic mixture of personal detachment and virtuous fulfillment of one’s duties. This advice may be apposite to the great sage himself, who in his retirement manages to combine “the charms of solitary life” with the virtues requisite for society, but not to her, a woman absorbed in the political vicissitudes of her family. As one disaster follows another, her fragile aptitude fails to stand up to the constant trials and “injurious accidents that befall” her

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 88.

house. One cannot in real life take up political responsibilities and remain calmly detached, finding the space and time to attend to the betterment of one's soul.<sup>96</sup> One cannot separate the mind from its physical contexts; sometimes, overwhelmed by external events, the mind is defeated and is prevented from maintaining its mastery over the body and the passions.

Elizabeth's insistence on the connection between mind and body, not as an abstract philosophical question but as a practical moral precept, forces Descartes to stress the crucial role that the tools of the imagination should fulfill. Mere understanding cannot confront practical matters and needs the assistance of the imagination and sensation. A person who has all the reasons to be content but whose imagination is captivated by "tragedies full of dreadful events" will be unable to prevent sighs and tears. This in turn will cause physical pain, "alter the lungs and cause a cough." In order to prevent such a deterioration of health, one should take "great care to turn her imagination from sources of displeasure, and she should think of them" only when practical matters oblige her to. This advice, Descartes stresses, is a lesson he learned from his own personal experience.<sup>97</sup>

The real cure is, therefore, the guided imagination, which can attend to and concentrate on the positive elements in one's life and relegate evil incidents to their proper place as ephemeral nuisances. Then, asks Elizabeth, how can one guide the imagination to fulfill such a task; how can one achieve and consistently maintain such attention and concentration in a contingent and unstable world?<sup>98</sup> Descartes's remedy may be implemented only by those who can keep their rationality strong and retreat to

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 89: "If my life were entirely known to you, I think the fact that a sensitive mind, such as my own, has conserved itself for so long amidst so many difficulties, in a body so weak, with no counsel but that of her own reason and with no consolation but that of her own conscience, would seem more strange to you than the causes of this present malady."

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 92: "I have experienced in myself an illness nearly similar and even more dangerous, which was cured by the remedy I just outlined. For being born of a mother who died just a few days after my birth of a disease of the lungs caused by some unhappiness, I inherited from her a dry cough and a pale color which stayed with me until I was more than twenty years old, and which led all the doctors who saw me up to that point to condemn me to an early death. But I believe I have always had the inclination to regard things which present themselves to me from the most favorable perspective and to make my principal contentment depend on myself alone, and I believe that this inclination caused this indisposition, which was almost natural to me, to pass away little by little."

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 93.

their country house in Egmond, where, Elizabeth wishes, she “might learn of the truth you draw from your garden.”<sup>99</sup>

This is the turning point in the correspondence between Descartes, the great philosopher, and Princess Elizabeth. The attempt to bridge the gap between the notion of a detached, nonmaterial soul and rational involvement in a corporeal world with all its variety of misfortune and afflictions, has failed. Elizabeth’s bitter comments undermine Lipsius’s ideal of the Stoic garden as the proper location for the philosopher to contemplate inner constancy, for the promised result of moral aptitude and a dutiful personality. Descartes’s feeble response that one’s good sense ought to try and draw some benefit from any evil occurrences is of no avail, and at this moment in their correspondence he has no choice but to fall back to the ancient Stoics and suggest that Elizabeth read Seneca’s *De vita beata*.

Turning to the classical sources of Stoic morality exposes for the first time the infrastructure of Descartes’s scheme of relationship between the mind and the body. Until this point, Descartes has persistently remarked that the passions mediate between these two components of the human being. On the one hand the passions transmit to the mind certain sensations that divert the mind’s attention to the needs of the body. On the other hand, the passions allow the mind to control the body and to move it in accordance with the mind’s volition. Reading Seneca against the backdrop of his correspondence with Elizabeth, Descartes realizes that ascribing such a subsidiary role to the passions degrades them vis-à-vis the intellectual and moral goals of the human mind. In complying with Elizabeth’s request to “continue to correct Seneca,” Descartes begins a comprehensive review of classical moral philosophy, both Epicurean and Stoic.

Examining the precepts of the ancient Stoic philosophers, Descartes concludes that they rightly stressed the importance of virtue because it “depends entirely on our free will.” However, in positing such virtue as severe and opposed to pleasure, the Stoics made “all the vices equal, that it seems to me that only melancholic people or minds entirely detached from bodies” would be able to follow such moral demands.<sup>100</sup> Insofar as the mind is united to a body, the pleasures and goods it can aspire to attain are not only those concerned with the mind alone. Those pleasures which pertain to the *union* of mind and body appear confused in the

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 104.

imagination and thus cause one a distorted perception of reality. In order to control this effect and to have true knowledge of one's surroundings, it is required that the passions be examined, as channels towards procuring the good life. Descartes's radical conclusion is that "we need not despise [the passions] entirely, nor even that we ought to free ourselves from having the passions. It suffices that we render them subject to reason, and when we have thus tamed them they are sometimes the more useful the more they tend to excess."<sup>101</sup>

### *The Passions of the Sage*

In his *La Recherche de la Vérité*, Descartes deems curiosity and the passion for knowledge to be the embodiment of human insatiability, and thus the chief causes of human discontent. His method of doubt and his rendering of the soul as a "thinking thing" establish the path to tranquility and to limiting the human desire for knowledge.<sup>102</sup> The radical separation of mind and body is a necessary premise in tracing out this methodological path. Over the course of his correspondence with Princess Elizabeth, however, these assumptions crumble, in view of her insistence on transposing them from the enclosed country estate to her populated court. Descartes is forced to reformulate his attitude towards the passions and their role in the human search for scientific knowledge. Descartes confesses that "the soul is pleased in feeling itself moved by passions, no matter what nature they are, so long as it remains in control."<sup>103</sup> One cannot suppress one's emotions completely, nor divest oneself from passions.

In the final account of the matter in his *Les Passions de l'âme* (1649), Descartes has to admit that the passions have a positive and crucial role in scientific investigations.<sup>104</sup> Without the passions, one's soul would not be

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>102</sup> For Descartes's method of doubt see Janet Broughton, *Descartes's Method of Doubt* (Princeton, 2002), esp. 108–43.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>104</sup> For general discussions of *The Passions of the Soul* see: Deborah J. Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind* (Cambridge, 2006); and Sean Greenberg, "Descartes on the Passions: Function, Representation, and Motivation," *Noûs* 41:4 (2007): 714–34. For the Dutch context of this treatise and for the political implications of Descartes's reevaluation of the role of the passions and of the relationship between the mind and the body, see Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, Chapter 6; Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2002); and Theo Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch: Early Reactions to Cartesian Philosophy, 1637–1650* (Carbondale, 1992); and idem,

able to focus on the data presented to it: "The customary mode of all the passions is simply this, that they dispose the soul to desire those things which nature tells us are of use, and to persist in this desire";<sup>105</sup> Descartes later reiterates that the "utility of all the passions consists alone in their fortifying and perpetuating in the soul thoughts which it is good it should preserve, and which without that might easily be effaced from it."<sup>106</sup> In the final account, the passions do not negate and contradict reason, but are meant to serve the soul and assist it in attaining the good.

This new role of the passions necessitates a new scheme of the union of soul and body. This reorganization is presented in the first part of *Les Passions de l'âme*, suitably entitled, "Of Passions in General: And Occasionally of the Universal Nature of Man." The soul is no longer conceived of merely as a "thinking thing," but is now the managing director of a complex economy of bodily perceptions, emotions and passions, volitions and ratiocinations. The ideal image of the soul is no longer that of an arena for the victory of a tranquil and detached reason over passions and bodily agitations, but that of a balanced economy ruled by human free will and seeking the good life in this world.

The organizing scheme for this new economy of passions and perception is determined by a new understanding of the role of curiosity and a spectrum of passions that moves from wonder to generosity. Curiosity, in its new garment of "admiration and wonder," is no longer an illness, but the prime generator of intellectual motion, and therefore a passion constitutive for science. Wonder "is useful, in as much as it causes us to learn and retain in our memory things of which we were formerly ignorant, for we shall only wonder at that which appears rare and extraordinary to us."<sup>107</sup> Wonder should initiate investigation and through investigation and study wonder can be transformed into rigorous philosophy: "Although it is good to be born with some inclination towards this passion, because that

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"Les passions et la fièvre: l'idée de la maladie chez Descartes et quelques cartésiens néerlandais," *Tractrix* 1 (1989): 45–61.

<sup>105</sup> Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, Article LII, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes* (trans. E. S. Haldane and C. R. T. Ross; 2 vols.; Cambridge, 1911), 1:358.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, Article LXXIV, 1:364.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, Article LXXV, 1:364. This is Descartes's take on Aristotle's notion of wonder and its epistemological role in *Metaphysics* I 982b 12–22. See Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (ed. J. Barnes; 2 vols.; Princeton, 1984), 2:1554. For Aristotle this is a general historical argument about the origins of human philosophy, whereas Descartes's notion of wonder is personal.



disposes us for the acquisition of the sciences, we must at the same time afterwards try to free ourselves from it as much as possible.”<sup>108</sup>

Wonder is a basic passion that defines the general turn of the soul towards its environment. That “wonder” enables the union of soul with body, and the other primitive passions (love, hatred, desire, joy, and sadness) ensue from it.

Balancing this outward motion is achieved, not by an act of reason but by cultivating the passion of generosity (*la générosité*), which assesses the true limits of one’s actions and volitions, as it “causes a man to esteem himself as highly as he legitimately can.” This passion consists in the “free disposition” of one’s will and in using that will “well or ill.”<sup>109</sup> Cultivating this passion results in humility and is a “remedy against all unruliness of the passions,” since “those who are generous in this way are naturally impelled to do great things, and at the same time to undertake nothing of which they do not feel themselves capable.”<sup>110</sup> The generous person is first and foremost a social being attending to the good of his fellow human beings: “And because they do not hold anything more important than to do good to other men and to disdain their individual interests, they are for this reason always courteous, affable, and obliging towards everyone.” Furthermore, generosity, in the final account, is the key to correct negotiations with other members of the society: generous persons are “entirely masters of their passions, particularly of the desires, of jealousy and envy”; therefore, they never disclose their weaknesses in public and “they never give so much advantage to their enemies as to recognise that they are hurt by them.”<sup>111</sup>

The Cartesian natural philosopher is necessarily embedded in the world; not only can he not escape its vicissitudes, but he must embrace it in order to produce meaningful knowledge. Descartes rejects Lipsius’s Neostoic conviction that the sage is a citizen of the world—“For a high and loftie mind will not suffer itself to be penned by OPINION within such narrow bounds but conceiveth and knoweth the whole world to be his owne.”<sup>112</sup> Instead of this cold and disinterested involvement in public affairs, Descartes suggests that one’s political responsibility can result only from a passionate relationship to the world and to human society:

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., Article LXXVI, 1:365.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., Article CLIII, 1:401.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., Article CLVI, 1:402–3.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Lipsius, *Two Bookes of Constancie*, 20.



One does not know how to subsist alone . . . one is one part of the universe and, more particularly even, one part of this earth, one part of this state, and of this society, and this family, to which one is joined by his home, by his oath, by his birth . . . in considering oneself as part of the public one takes pleasure in acting well toward everyone.<sup>113</sup>

Descartes's schema is a new economy of senses and passions, combining wonder and reasoned observations to form "something of *great constancy*." Like Shakespeare's Hippolyta and Theseus, Descartes concludes his *Passions of the Soul* with a clear and powerful vindication of the imagination and the passions as necessary elements in the mind's well-being in the world: "For the rest, the soul may have pleasures of its own, but as to those which are common to it and the body, they depend entirely on the passions, so the men whom they can most move are capable of partaking most of the enjoyment in this life."<sup>114</sup>

The persona of Descartes's new scientist is molded on a calculated tension between reason and passions, between an enclosed and aloof mind and its concentrated investigations of the physical world. Managing this tension is the quintessence of Cartesian wisdom: "But the principal use of prudence or self-control is that it teaches us so to be masters of our passions, and to so control and guide them that the evils which they cause are quite bearable, and we even derive joy from them all."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, 112.

<sup>114</sup> Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, Article CCXII, 1:427.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*



LOVE FOR ALL: THE MEDICAL DISCUSSION OF LOVESICKNESS IN  
JACOB ZAHALON'S *THE TREASURE OF LIFE* (OTZAR HA-ḤAYYIM)\*

Michal Altbauer-Rudnik

It is my cruel parents who have been responsible for breaking our engagement that we lovingly made together, thereby leaving me in despair. So let me pray to One who is full of compassion that in His great mercy He will relieve you of your lovesickness.... (Leone de Sommi [Yehudah Sommo], *A Comedy of Betrothal*, Act III, Scene II; ca. 1550).<sup>1</sup>

Jacob Zahalon (1630–1693), a Roman rabbi and physician, presents the perfect example of a Jewish tradition that dates back to the Middle Ages and that blossomed in early modern Italy. This was a tradition of scholars whose lives, practices, and writings gave expression to a strong connection between religious and medical knowledge. Zahalon's central role in the Jewish community of Rome during the second half of the seventeenth century has made him the subject of research on daily life in the Roman Jewish ghetto during that period, as well as the subject of more general research on Jewish medicine.<sup>2</sup> Only a few studies have truly acknowledged the innovative aspects of *The Treasure of Life* (*Otzar ha-Ḥayyim*), a medical instruction book written in Hebrew.<sup>3</sup> None, as far as I know, have

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\* This space above the footnotes in my papers is usually reserved for my thanks to Michael Heyd for his helpful and inspiring comments. Naturally, this time, he has not read the paper. It is with great pleasure and honor that I dedicate the paper to him, and I would like to thank him for his ongoing guidance, support, and inspiration, which I have enjoyed ever since I was an undergraduate student. This paper was written while I served as a fellow at the Scholion Interdisciplinary Research Center in Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University, during the years 2007–2010.

<sup>1</sup> Leone de Sommi, *A Comedy of Betrothal* (trans. A. S. Golding; Ottawa, 1988), 97.

<sup>2</sup> For short biographical papers on Zahalon, see Harry Friedenwald, "Jacob Zahalon of Rome," in his *The Jews and Medicine: Essays* (2 vols.; Baltimore, 1944), 1:268–79; Harry A. Savitz, "Jacob Zahalon and his Book, *The Treasure of Life*," *New England Journal of Medicine* 213:4 (1935): 167–76; Aaron J. Feingold, "The Marriage of Science and Ethics: Three Jewish Physicians of the Renaissance," in *Jews and Medicine* (ed. N. Berger; Philadelphia, 1995), 101–05. For discussions of his various opinions on medical issues, see, for example, J. Farquhar Fulton, "Lemon Juice and Scurvy," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 9:1 (1954): 121; Samuel Kottak, "Étude du précis de pédiatrie, extrait du livre *Otzar ha-Ḥayyim* (*Le Trésor de la vie*) de Jacob ben Isaac Zahalon (1630–1693)," in *Mélange d'Histoire de la médecine hébraïque* (ed. G. Freudenthal and S. Kottak; Leiden, 2003), 183–207.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob ben Isaac Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Ḥayyim* (Venice, 1683 [in Hebrew]). I consulted the copy held in the Medical Library of the Hadassah Medical Center in Ein Kerem, Jerusalem.

referred to his concise analysis of lovesickness (*ḥoli ahavah*) that appears in the book. In a brief discussion consisting of only nine lines, Zahalon presents the symptoms of the disease as well as its various treatments.<sup>4</sup>

The current paper aims to examine this brief discussion and its context within the early modern European discourse of lovesickness, taking into account the genre of *The Treasure of Life*, Zahalon's medical practice, and his own life story, as well as the concept of love among Italian Jews during that time. I then suggest possible explanations for the inclusion of the discussion of lovesickness in *The Treasure of Life* and note the ways in which this discussion offers a fresh line of thinking in regard to conceptions of love and marriage among Italian Jewry in the early modern period.

### *Lovesickness in Early Modern Europe*

Although the present study focuses on the early modern period, it is worthwhile to consider how the description of love-related pathologies led to a specific medical diagnosis in earlier periods, since many of the features of this presentation did not change in later generations.<sup>5</sup> The earliest and most ordered discussions on the subject of lovesickness can be found in the writings of Aretaeus the Cappadocian (practiced first century CE) and of Galen (ca. 129–after 210 CE), both of whom described the disease as a depressive illness with symptoms that matched those of melancholy, yet not with its etiology. Etiological explanations of melancholy were based upon the humoral theory, which held that the human body was made up of four humors—blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm—each characterized by different qualities of heat and moisture. Good health was the result of an optimal balance among the four humors. According to the Hippocratic Corpus, the symptoms associated with melancholy included

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Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this paper are my own. For purposes of reading fluency, I have used English translations of medical treatises when available.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 58<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> This is not, however, the focal point of the current paper. For more complete discussions of this topic see Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature, 1580–1642* (East Lansing, 1951), 128–42; Stanley W. Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times* (New Haven, 1986), 356–65; Mary F. Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1990), 3–30; Donald A. Beecher and Massimo Ciavolella, “Jacques Ferrand and the Tradition of Erotic Melancholy in Western Culture,” in Jacques Ferrand, *A Treatise on Lovesickness* (trans. and ed. D. A. Beecher and M. Ciavolella; Syracuse, 1990), 39–97; Marion A. Wells, *The Secret Wound: Love Melancholy and Early Modern Romance* (Stanford, 2007), 19–59.

depression, fear, eating disorders, insomnia, irritability, and restlessness.<sup>6</sup> But, whereas in the case of melancholy, the depression and fear have no apparent cause, in the case of lovesickness the cause is an obvious one—i.e., separation from the object of love. While the cause of melancholy was understood to be physiological and natural (an excess of black bile), the cause of lovesickness was understood as being primarily emotional.

The medical view of lovesickness during the Middle Ages was not dramatically different. Oribasius (ca. 325–400), Alexander of Tralles (ca. 525–605), and Paul of Aegina (ca. 625–690) were among those who described the lovesick person as displaying the symptoms of melancholy. The contribution of Arabic medicine of the ninth and tenth centuries to the consideration of this subject was to consolidate the symptoms into a specific diagnosis of love melancholy. The clinical picture of the condition, however, remained relatively unchanged. Although the conceptual contributions of medieval courtly love literature and of Italian Renaissance treatises on love will not be discussed here, it is important to mention their immense influence on contemporary medical writing, as well as on the blurring of boundaries between philosophical discussion and medical analysis that characterized the medical literature on this subject during these periods.<sup>7</sup>

The volume of medical literature concerning lovesickness increased dramatically from the mid-sixteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century. Eminent physicians and scholars, mainly but not exclusively French—such as François Valleriola (1573), André du Laurens (1597), Jean Aubrey (1599), Jean de Veyries (1609), Jacques Ferrand (1610), Robert Burton (1621), and Daniel Sennert (1629)<sup>8</sup>—devoted dozens and sometimes

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<sup>6</sup> The Hippocratic Corpus is a compilation of over sixty medical writings traditionally attributed to Hippocrates of Cos. The Corpus dates back to 420–350 BCE and there is no consensus as to which parts of the Corpus (if any) were actually written by Hippocrates; see Vivian Nutton, “Medicine in the Greek World, 800–50 BC,” in *The Western Medical Tradition, 800 BC to 1800 AD* (ed. L. I. Conrad et al.; Cambridge, 1995), 19–22.

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion see Michal Altbauer-Rudnik, “Love, Melancholy, and Social Order: Lovesickness in France, England, and the Italian Jewish Communities, 1550–1650” (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2010), 57–70 (in Hebrew).

<sup>8</sup> Franciscus Valleriola, *Observationum medicinalium libri VI* (Lyon, 1605), 140–66; André du Laurens, *Discours de la conservation de la veue: des maladies melancholiques: des catarhes: & de la vieillesse* (Paris, 1598), 164–75; Jean Aubrey, *L'antidote d'amour* (Paris, 1599); Jean de Veyries, *La genealogie de l'amour divisée en deux livres* (Paris, 1609); Jacques Ferrand, *De la maladie d'amour ou mélancholie érotique* (Paris, 1623); Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1651), 611–866; Daniel Sennert, *Medicina practica* (Lyon, 1629), 430–41. Discussions of lovesickness in that period appeared both in treatises devoted solely to the subject and in general textbooks that described pathologies *de capite ad pedem*, in

hundreds of pages to its specific diagnosis and prognosis, but most of all to its etiology and therapy.

Predisposition to the disease was linked to the humoral dominance of blood, a sanguine tendency, which meant that the body was inclined to moisture and heat. This high level of blood in the human body was believed to produce a natural inclination to arousal of all the passions, especially erotic love. However, the understanding was that a natural inclination of the body to melancholy could not, in itself, bring about love melancholy. Sanguinity would upset the humoral balance of the body, but could not by itself cause any agony or physical distress. Thus, sanguinity was described as the “contagion” stage. The presence of a beautiful object that could attract the individual’s eye would of course be necessary to bring about the actual illness. Melancholy, it was understood, took over only in the second stage of the disease, when, for some reason, the person was separated from his or her beloved and could not consummate his or her love. The unfulfilled love would then dry and cool the body, creating a dominance of the black bile, which would precipitate melancholy. Excessive mental action, due to constant meditation on the object of love, would exacerbate the dominance of melancholy, while the emotional turmoil and the symptoms of melancholy would promote the spread of black bile throughout the body, and would thus intensify the person’s despair and physical suffering. French physician Jacques Ferrand (ca. 1575–after 1623) lists the symptoms briefly, as follows (before providing details on each of them):

Pale and wan complexion, joined by a slow fever . . . palpitations of the heart, swelling of the face, depraved appetite, a sense of grief, sighing, causeless tears, irresistible hunger, raging thirst, oppression, suffocation, insomnia, headaches, melancholy, epilepsy, madness, uterine fury, satyriasis, and other pernicious symptoms . . .<sup>9</sup>

Following an accurate diagnosis, which could be made only by an authorized physician, the humoral balance was to be restored, mainly by bloodletting, but also through dietary changes and pharmaceutical prescriptions.

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contemporary *Observationes medicæ* literature, and in medical dissertations from the various European faculties of medicine; see Altbauer-Rudnik, “Love, Melancholy, and Social Order,” 72–73.

<sup>9</sup> Ferrand, *A Treatise on Lovesickness*, 229.

The lengthy descriptions of the disorder's clinical picture originating from this period were, as noted above, very much based upon the classical and medieval medical traditions, such that Berrios and Kennedy concluded, "this [long-held medical] view remained untouched until the middle of the seventeenth century."<sup>10</sup> This view, however, is inaccurate. Not only had the scope of writing on the subject increased dramatically by that point in time, but there were also new and unique features relating to etiology and to therapy that were common to the medical discussions of lovesickness during the early modern period and that did not reappear in any later writings. These features imply that the root causes of the disease were perceived during that period as fundamentally social in nature and were unique to the relevant chronologically and culturally limited contexts. What appeared, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to be an inclination to this disease shared by many young upper class men and women, arising from their rich diet or idle lifestyle, came to reveal itself as a disease with a particular social origin—a characteristic which becomes especially obvious in light of the physicians' discussions of its prognosis. Alongside the varied medical solutions that are described, all physicians of this period were in decisive agreement that the patients could be healed completely only through union with the love object. While some noted that this union could be realized only in accordance with divine and human laws, others directly attacked the legal and social obstacles that prevented young couples from being joined in marriage. As I argue elsewhere, this medical manifestation of social distress was based on a concrete social reality, reflected in legislation as well as literary sources, in which the choice of a spouse was made entirely by the parents, and in which most of the marriage arrangements were made between families of the same socioeconomic status.<sup>11</sup>

The humoral model, alongside the traditional medical references to a pathology connected with love, played a substantial role in this discourse. The systematic association of the disorder with melancholy cannot be dismissed either, given that in this period the latter was considered, both medically and legally, to be a form of dotage or partial insanity (rather

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<sup>10</sup> G. E. Berrios and N. Kennedy, "Erotomania: A Conceptual History," *History of Psychiatry* 13:4 (2002): 384.

<sup>11</sup> Michal Altbauer-Rudnik, "Love, Madness, and Social Order: Love Melancholy in France and England in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries," *Gesnerus* 63 (2006): 33–45.

than madness or frenzy);<sup>12</sup> and gained not only medical but also intellectual and literary popularity. The period actually came to be referred to as *L'âge d'or de la mélancholie*—because of the exceptional artistic traits and divine inspiration associated with melancholy.<sup>13</sup> These elements made it possible to anchor the susceptibility of a small but significant segment of society—young wealthy men and women—within a medical framework that did not label them as completely insane and that demanded not only surgical, pharmaceutical, or dietary solutions but also a social one: the pathologizing of love on the one hand, and its prescription as a cure, on the other.

The level of bluntness to be found in the contemporary discourse on the subject corresponds to the social realities prevalent in different countries during this period. In those countries where the legal or customary limitations on love-based marriages were more strictly enforced, and where the consequent emotional distress was thus more intensely felt, as in France, it was more convenient to deal with the problem as a strictly medical one. There, physicians sought to regulate emotions using rational tools, by suggesting surgical and pharmacological therapies. In countries where limitations were less strictly enforced, and where criticism of laws and customs that stood in the way of young lovers already existed, as was the case in England, the adaptation of social methods to achieve a cure

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<sup>12</sup> English law, for example, defined melancholy as partial insanity, based on arguments made in 1592 by the jurist Richard Cosin. Cosin claimed that a person could be insane with regard to specific issues while remaining perfectly sane with regard to others to which he was to be held legally accountable for his acts. During the seventeenth century, melancholy was used as the perfect example for such partial insanity. It was claimed that only partial harm, expressed by specific hallucinations, was caused to the melancholic patient's imagination. For the relevant sections of Cosin's essay, see Richard Cosin, "Conspiracie, for Pretended Reformation," in *Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry* (ed. R. A. Hunter and I. Macalpine; New York, 1982), 43–45. For a detailed discussion of the subject, see Stanley Jackson, "Melancholia and Partial Insanity," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 19:2 (1983): 173–84.

<sup>13</sup> The term *L'âge d'or de la mélancholie* usually refers to the period from 1480 to 1640, and appears often in the literature dealing with early modern European melancholy. For detailed discussions of the subject, see, for example, Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 73–127; Raymond Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (London, 1964); Vieda Skultans, *English Madness* (London, 1979), 17–51; Jean Delumeau, "L'Âge d'or de la mélancholie," *L'histoire* 42 (February 1982): 26–37; Winfried Schleiner, *Melancholy, Genius, and Utopia in the Renaissance* (Wiesbaden, 1991), 19–29; Jennifer Radden, "Introduction: From Melancholic States to Clinical Depression," in *The Nature of Melancholy* (ed. J. Radden; Oxford, 2000), 3–60; Noel L. Brann, *The Debate over the Origin of Genius During the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden, 2002), 247–332; Michael Heyd, "Be Sober and Reasonable": *The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 1995), 44–64.



became prevalent and might even have contributed to the development of the notion of romantic love.<sup>14</sup>

*Jacob Zahalon and his Book The Treasure of Life*

Jacob Zahalon was a prolific writer; nevertheless, the details of his biography have remained relatively obscure. In his writings he made almost no reference to his own life and family.<sup>15</sup> His life was not studied systematically until the late twentieth century. A bilingual edition of his *A Guide for Preachers (Or ha-Darshanim)* was published in 1987 with an introduction by Henry Adler Sosland that reviews the physician's life and times, and this serves as an important addition to the study of Zahalon's biography and writings.<sup>16</sup> What is known is that Zahalon was born in Rome in 1630 to a family of Spanish origin, with branches in Rome and Constantinople.<sup>17</sup> He received rabbinical ordination at an early age<sup>18</sup> and later studied medicine at the University of Rome, eventually earning the title of *Doctor Philosophiae ac Medicinae*, probably around the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>19</sup> Upon completing his medical studies, Zahalon joined the

<sup>14</sup> Altbauer-Rudnik, "Love, Madness, and Social Order," 39–43.

<sup>15</sup> Zahalon does mention his father and wife. See Henry Adler Sosland, *A Guide to Preachers on Composing and Delivering Sermons: The Or ha-Darshanim of Jacob Zahalon* (New York, 1987), 17 n. 29.

<sup>16</sup> In his preface, Sosland refers to a letter he received from Cecil Roth in February 1970, in which Roth described Zahalon as an "overlooked figure," especially in light of his position as the "spiritual leader of real force" of the Roman ghetto at that time. See Sosland, *A Guide to Preachers*, ix.

<sup>17</sup> For more information on the Zahalons and their descendants, see Joseph Jacobs and Isaac Broydé, "Zahalon," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com>; Sosland, *A Guide to Preachers*, 18–20, 66–68.

<sup>18</sup> Regarding the curriculum in Italian yeshivas and the ordination of rabbis in Italy in that era, see Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (trans. A. Oldcorn; Berkeley, 1994), 133–44.

<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the extensive scholarship on other early modern Italian universities at that time, research on La Sapienza in Rome is rather sparse. It appears that the study of anatomy and the use of autopsy were rather developed there; this is one of the few fields on which scholars have in fact focused in studying La Sapienza, because of the university's unique relation to the Catholic establishment. See, for example, Andrea Carlino, *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning* (trans. J. Tedeschi and A. C. Tedeschi; Chicago, 1999), 69–119. At the time of the university's seven hundredth anniversary in 2003, the reopening of the Department of the History of Medicine and of the Museum of the History of Medicine evoked new interest in the university's early modern medical curriculum. See, for example, Silvia Marinozzi, "Rei Medicae Praelectiones Theoricae Proemialium Quaestionum ad Mentem Peritissimi Pauli Manfredi 1695 Paulus de Valle Sbt: Una Raccolta di lezioni di medicina teorica del 1695 allo Studium Romano," *Medicina nei Secoli* 16:2

rabbinical council of the Roman Jewish community, served as a preacher and ran the communal register (the *pinkas kehilah*), in addition to working as a physician in the city's Jewish ghetto.<sup>20</sup> In June of 1656, Rome was struck by the plague, and Zahalon acted as both a physician and a preacher. His book, *The Treasure of Life*, consists of remarkably lively and detailed descriptions of life in the ghetto during this plague epidemic.<sup>21</sup>

In 1660, in addition to his other duties, Zahalon was appointed as supervisor of the dissemination of Torah knowledge among members of the Jewish community in Rome. Whether this was a response to attempts to convert Jews to Catholicism or to internal factors that were weakening the community's religious life,<sup>22</sup> the appointment testifies to the great esteem in which Zahalon's knowledge and faith were held, as well as to his close relationships within the Jewish community.

In addition to carrying out various communal duties, Zahalon also managed to write prolifically. His most famous work is *Precious Pearls* (*Margaliot Tovot*), an abbreviated version of an earlier work dealing with morality entitled *Instruction in the Duties of the Heart* (*Hovot ha-Levavot*) which had been written several centuries earlier by Bahya ben Yosef Ibn Paquda (ca. 1050–1120).<sup>23</sup> Zahalon divided the original text into thirty chapters and added an introduction, as well as six prayers, among which was a "Prayer for Physicians." The prayer reflects Zahalon's view of the medical profession as a divine mission, and of the physician as God's earthly servant. Zahalon wrote other works, among them commentaries on various books of the Bible and on Maimonides' (1138–1204) writings, as

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(2004): 407–27; Luigi Romanini, "Storia dell'insegnamento ortopedico a Roma," *Medicina nei Secoli* 17:1 (2005): 41–46. As far as I know, there has been no systematic study of the student body at the University of Rome during this period, yet it seems that the acceptance of a Jewish student to the institution, which was an integral part of the Catholic establishment, would not have been a common phenomenon. See also Joshua O. Leibowitz, "Rabbi Jacob Zahalon of Rome and his Hymn for Shabbat of Hanukah," in *A Memorial Volume for Enzo Sereni* (ed. D. Carpi et al.; Jerusalem, 1970), 166–67 (in Hebrew).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>21</sup> Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Hayyim*, 21; see also Joshua O. Leibowitz, "Bubonic Plague in the Ghetto of Rome (1656): Descriptions by Zahalon and Gastaldi," *Korot* 4:3–4 (1967): 155–69 (in Hebrew).

<sup>22</sup> Sosland, *A Guide to Preachers*, 30–31.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob Isaac Zahalon, *Sefer Margaliot Tovot* (Venice, 1665 [in Hebrew]). Bahya ben Yosef Ibn Paquda's work was originally written in Arabic and was translated into Hebrew in 1161 by Judah Ibn Tibbon. It was first printed in 1489 in Naples and was later published in Hebrew, Arabic, Yiddish, and various European languages. The book was originally divided into twelve sections, in which "the duties of the heart"—i.e., religious commands and moral principles—are discussed.

well as several additional works concerning the delivery of sermons, but these were never published.<sup>24</sup>

In 1680, Zahalon accepted an invitation from the Jewish community in Ferrara, and consequently left Rome. Giulio Bartolucci, a contemporary Catholic Hebraist who notes that he was close to Zahalon, wrote that the Roman physician “went [to Ferrara] eagerly in order to avoid the envy of his Roman opponents and to settle in a convenient place to print his books, due to the proximity to Venice and its famous printing houses.”<sup>25</sup> Ferrara’s Jewish community was relatively small, but due to the tolerant attitude of its rulers, it was both financially and culturally thriving. This may have appealed to Zahalon and his family. In Ferrara, Zahalon was considered “one of three most remarkable men of his generation in terms of his wisdom.”<sup>26</sup> Zahalon practiced medicine in Ferrara and worked as a rabbi there as well, until his death in September 1693.

*The Treasure of Life* is the only medical book Zahalon ever published. It was published in Venice in 1683 and was intended as part of a larger literary work, the rest of which was never printed, due to financial difficulties.<sup>27</sup> As originally conceived, the book was almost two hundred pages long and was divided into thirteen sections, covering all fields of medicine (although the thirteenth section was never actually published).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Morashah Qehilat Ya'aqov* is Zahalon's commentary on the first three books of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* (*Repetition of the Torah*): *Ha-Mada* (Knowledge), *Ahavah* (Love), and *Zemanim* (Times). *Yeshuot Ya'aqov* is a commentary on the book of Isaiah. *Titen Emet le-Ya'aqov* is a collection of Zahalon's commentaries on biblical stories; *Zahalah ve-Rinah* is his commentary on the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and the Book of Daniel; *Shuvu Elai* is a book of sermons; *Or ha-Darshanim* is a guide for preachers on composing and delivering sermons and was published for the first time in 1987 (n. 15 above). Zahalon's commentary on the writings of Thomas Aquinas, although known to have been written, has never been located. For a complete review of these works, see Sosland, *A Guide to Preachers*, 32–35, 69–72.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Leibowitz, “Rabbi Jacob Zahalon of Rome and His Hymn,” 170. On Bartolucci's relations with Zahalon, see Sosland, *A Guide to Preachers*, 49–52.

<sup>26</sup> As stated by Rabbi Nathaniel ben Aaron Segre; the comment is quoted in Sosland, *A Guide to Preachers*, 65–66.

<sup>27</sup> The subtitle of the book defines it as the third part of another work, *The Treasure of Wisdom* (*Otzar ha-Hokhmot*), which presumably means it was published a considerable time after its composition. It seems that this is the only part of the larger work envisaged by Zahalon that was ever printed. No other part seemed to have been preserved. See also David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven, 1995), 232 n. 11; Sosland, *A Guide to Preachers*, 71–72.

<sup>28</sup> The thirteenth section of *The Treasure of Life* was to have dealt with diseases of the soul. Although it is included in the book's table of contents, the end of the twelfth part includes a statement from the publisher, Jacob Abuhab, in which he explains that there was not enough money to publish the entire book.

Thematically, it can be divided into three main sections: 1) Overview of Zahalon's medical approach (concerning a recommended regimen, diagnosis, etiology, symptoms, and therapy); 2) pathologies based on the classic anatomical division of the body, *ex capite ad pedem*; 3) various specific pathologies (fevers, natural toxins and antidotes, gynecology and obstetrics, and pediatrics).

The book was written in Hebrew and was printed in tiny Rashi script. The text also included Hebrew transliterations of Italian medical terms. The fact that it was written in Hebrew and that the transliterated terms were Italian rather than Latin, is the first indication of the book's objective, which was to serve as an accessible medical instruction book for Italian Jewish communities.<sup>29</sup> The small print, as well as the lack of any mention of medical controversies, allowed Zahalon to compress an enormous amount of knowledge into a tiny format. This serves as further evidence of the writer's objective: namely, to offer advice which was concise and accessible (both thematically and physically), in contrast to the voluminous encyclopedic medical writings of the time. Most of the discussion in the book is organized in a "question and answer" format, very similar to the rabbinic *responsa* literature. This format also added to the book's accessibility, by allowing the author to provide diagnoses and therapeutic options quickly. Zahalon states his goals at the very beginning of the book:

In some towns there are no physicians, but there is a scholar who is able to understand, study closely, and seek cures for the sick in this book. Where the physician lives far from the town and there is no time to be lost until he arrives, or where several physicians visit a sick man and differ as to their treatment, the learned man can inform himself from the valid and expert judgment of this book. This book will likewise be of benefit to physicians themselves, who will find a table set [*shulḥan arukh*, a rabbinic expression for an organized set of directives] for them; and it does not expound on differences of opinion at great length, as is the common method in books of medicine. I have only given the most proper, accepted and well-tried methods of cure. Furthermore, this book will be of benefit to the poor men that are unable to pay the fees of a Gentile physician. They will easily learn the treatment of their diseases in this book. . . .<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> David Ruderman argued that Zahalon intended this book mainly for East European Jewry, "where Hebrew was still the primary language of instruction." See Ruderman, *Jewish Thought*, 235. This seems unlikely to me, in light of the hundreds of specifically Italian terms that are transliterated into Hebrew in the book, many of them related to specific therapies and to various medicinal herbs.

<sup>30</sup> Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Hayyim*, unpaginated, second page of preface.

In this sense, Zahalon's book was indeed a pioneering work. Not only was it "the first published Hebrew book that discussed all fields of medicine, was devoted solely to [the subject of] medicine and was originally written in Hebrew," as Leibowitz has noted,<sup>31</sup> it was also the first modern popular medical advice book in Hebrew. David Ruderman has commented that in spite of Zahalon's intentions, the book "could hardly be called 'popular' compendia in the sense that Dr. Spock's baby care books are today. No evidence suggests that such Hebrew textbooks were to be found in the libraries of many Jewish households." Ruderman argues that the fact that *The Treasure of Life* was published only once is further evidence of its lack of popularity.<sup>32</sup>

In my view, Ruderman's criteria for judging the book's popularity are slightly problematic, given the character of its potential readers: those living within seventeenth-century Italian Jewish communities. Research regarding Italian Jewish libraries of this period indicates the deteriorating status of Italian Jewry at that time.<sup>33</sup> These communities experienced frequent expulsions and lived in a secluded fashion, in ghettos. Their financial resources were limited, as was the scope of their cultural activities; the very physical spaces in which they lived were similarly constricted. The Jewish publisher Soncino's initiative—the printing of excerpts from Maimonides' *Regimen of Health* on decorated and framed canvases<sup>34</sup>—would seem to have been a practical response to the aforementioned need for portable and accessible medical information, as the product could serve as an inexpensive, light, and small source of medical advice. While there were earlier written sources that provided advice on hygiene in Hebrew,<sup>35</sup> Zahalon's initiative made a vast amount of theoretical and

<sup>31</sup> Leibowitz, "Rabbi Jacob Zahalon of Rome and His Hymn," 172.

<sup>32</sup> Ruderman referred to Zahalon's *The Treasure of Life* in the introduction to his discussion of the physician Tobias Cohen and of his medical book *Ma'aseh Tuvyyah* (Venice, 1707)—highlighting the differences between the works, while focusing on the innovations in Tobias's book. See Ruderman, *Jewish Thought*, esp. 229–55. (Citations and reference are from pages 198–99 and 254, respectively.)

<sup>33</sup> See for example Shifra Baruchson, *Books and Readers: The Reading Interests of Italian Jews at the Close of the Renaissance* (Ramat-Gan, 1993), 105–118 (in Hebrew); Robert Bonfil, "The Libraries of Italian Jewry Between the Middle Ages and Modern Times," *Pe'amim* 52 (Summer 1992): 4–15 (in Hebrew); Shlomo Simonsohn, "Books and Libraries of the Mantuan Jews, 1595," *Kiryat Sefer* 37:1 (1962): 103–122 (in Hebrew).

<sup>34</sup> Moses A. Shulvass, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (New York, 1955), 173 (in Hebrew).

<sup>35</sup> It is sufficient to mention here examples such as Ben Sira's discussion of diet, the frequent references in the Jerusalem Talmud to personal and public hygiene, Assaf the Physician's discussions of preventative medicine, and the Hebrew translations of Maimonides' *Regimen of Health*.

practical medical knowledge accessible to ordinary people, and in this sense his work was indeed pioneering.<sup>36</sup> The fact that the book was not within the reach of a large audience because of the general community's socioeconomic difficulties does not minimize the importance of this pioneering endeavor.

Zahalon's vast knowledge and his combined familiarity with classic medical and Jewish traditions, as well as his clinical expertise and proficiency in popular medicine, are all made apparent throughout *The Treasure of Life*. He often refers to Hippocrates and to Galen (especially in the theoretical sections of his discussion), as well as to Nahmanides (1194–1270), Maimonides, and two of his renowned Jewish contemporaries Amatus Lusitanus (1511–1568) and Zacutus Lusitanus (1575–1642). His vast practical experience is manifested in his detailed description of a plague epidemic, and likewise in the personal remarks that accompany the questions and answers that are set out in the book. These remarks regularly refer to the prospects of success of the various therapeutic techniques that he advises.

Ruderman has claimed that the strongest impression created by the book "is one of self-assurance, of...absolute certainty...there is no sense of hesitation, no unresolved therapy, no disagreement or proposal of alternatives about the correct physiology or pathology." He adds that the absence of "elaborate ruminations on the metaphysical and physical worlds...was apparently the result of lack of funds alone."<sup>37</sup> I would disagree with this assessment. In my view, Zahalon's tendency to keep his discussion concise was the result of neither an exaggerated sense of self-esteem nor a lack of money, but was instead characteristic of a new genre of medical literature. Although Zahalon does tend to resolve controversies by making definitive statements based on classic medical tradition as well as on his vast clinical experience, he also often acknowledges, with reference to particular issues, that "there is a controversy among physicians." However, the inclusion of descriptions of such controversies, as he himself notes in the above-quoted preface, would have interfered with

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<sup>36</sup> Matthew Ramsey has defined the popularization of medicine as a process which makes medical concepts and techniques accessible to laymen in order to preserve their health, and which equips the reader with real diagnostic and therapeutic tools—in contrast to the study of medicine for the purpose of satisfying intellectual curiosity. This process of popularization, according to Ramsey, was characteristic of the early seventeenth century. See Matthew Ramsey, "The Popularization of Medicine in France, 1650–1900," in *The Popularization of Medicine, 1650–1800* (ed. Roy Porter; London, 1992), 97–98.

<sup>37</sup> Ruderman, *Jewish Thought*, 232–34.

his objective of offering accessible and practical medical advice. It was, in fact, virtually impossible for Zahalon not to have been aware of the contemporary medical discourse regarding the issues he discussed, in light of his numerous references to the views of his contemporary Jewish colleagues, and in light of the known curriculum of the faculty of medicine at the University of Rome, where he had studied.<sup>38</sup>

*"How Does One Cure Lovesickness?"*

The discussion of lovesickness in *The Treasure of Life* is a response to the question, "How does one cure lovesickness?" Zahalon does not consider this malady to be a form of madness, and locates the discussion in the part of the book dealing with diseases of the head (*holaei ha-rosh*) rather than with those of the soul (*holaei ha-nefesh*).<sup>39</sup> His comments include no concrete reference to either melancholic or manic symptoms, but the question that follows in the text does deal with mania.

By locating the discussion in the part of the book that deals with the head rather than the section that deals with the liver (i.e., in the ninth part, in which he discusses diseases of the entrails), Zahalon shows that he does not consider lovesickness to be a choleric disease either. The association of lovesickness with choleric diseases is characteristic of the medical literature, which refers to the disease as hypochondriacal melancholy—an "unnatural melancholy" in which the liver is considered to be the organ that has been harmed due to metabolic procedures and, consequently, also affects the mind. In "natural" melancholy, characterized by an excessive amount of black bile, the mind is supposedly the locus of the disease and the head is the harmed organ.<sup>40</sup>

Although contemporary non-Jewish discussion of lovesickness stressed its melancholic nature, a predisposition to the disease was, as noted

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<sup>38</sup> In spite of its conservative image, the University of Rome maintained institutional openness to the seventeenth century's medical innovations. See, for example, Marinozzi's analysis of Paolo Manfredi's notes from his studies at the faculty of medicine there during the mid-seventeenth century. Manfredi's records indicate that both Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood and Thomas Willis's anatomical discoveries concerning the nervous system were part of the curriculum. See Marinozzi, "Rei Medicae Praelectiones Theoricae Proemialium Quaestionum," 407–27.

<sup>39</sup> Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Hayyim*, 58<sup>v</sup>. On the actual absence of the thirteenth part, which was intended to deal with the diseases of the soul, see n. 28 above.

<sup>40</sup> For early modern contemporary perceptions of the varieties of melancholy, see, for example, Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 148–55.



above, linked to a sanguine tendency. Some Jewish physicians, such as Amatus Lusitanus, Philotheus Elianus Montalto (1567–1616) or Zacutus Lusitanus, who discussed lovesickness, tended to stress a melancholic inclination, even at the initial stage, as being one of the causes for a predisposition to the disease.<sup>41</sup> This probably reflected the aforementioned general scholarly medical interest in melancholy, but might have also been an attempt to stress the relevance of lovesickness to Jews, who were considered to be especially disposed to melancholy.<sup>42</sup> Zahalon, in accordance with the book's characteristics, avoided a systematic presentation of the disease's etiology, but also avoided labeling it as "love melancholy," or associating it with the trendy melancholy diagnosis.

Zahalon refers to the subject of the patient's pulse and describes a "rapid pulse as if one has many troubles and affairs."<sup>43</sup> The unique love-sick pulse was often referred to in medical literature, and also served as a method for diagnosing the disease, in light of the patient's will to conceal his or her pathological state due to its undesirable social and familial consequences. Physicians used to randomly name the patient's acquaintances

<sup>41</sup> Amatus Lusitanus, *Curationum medicinalium centuriæ septem* (Bordeaux, 1620), 309; Philotheus Elianus Montalto, *Archipathologia in qua internarum capitis affectionum essentia, causæ, signa, præsagia & curatio accuratissima indagine edisseruntur* (Paris, 1614), 381; Zacutus Lusitanus, *De medicorum principum historia* (Lyon, 1657), 80.

<sup>42</sup> The melancholic inclination of the Jews was a major theme in many medical treatises, the earliest of which was probably Bernard de Gordon's *Lilium Medicinæ*, written in 1305. De Gordon notes that Jews suffer from melancholic blood and from an excess of melancholic humor, which becomes exacerbated due to their constant state of distress and fear; see Friedenwald, "Concerning Diseases of the Jews," in *The Jews and Medicine: Essays*, 2:527. Amatus Lusitanus, relying on Maimonides and on his own professional experience, writes that the excess of black melancholy bile characteristic of Jews is the result of the fear and sadness they experience, of their scholastic occupations, and of their unique diet. Amatus elaborated on this Jewish propensity to melancholy in his detailed description of the treatment that he had offered to Italian Jewish physician Azariah dei Rossi, presented as the forty-second case of his fourth *Centuria*. See Amatus Lusitanus, *Centuriæ Quatuor* (Venice, 1557), 566–77. In the twentieth case of his second *Centuria*, Amatus described the Italian Jews' tendency to suffer from melancholy, which he saw as being caused by the nature of their diet. See Amatus Lusitanus, *Centuriæ Quatuor*, 239–42. Another Jewish physician, Isaac (Yshac) Cardoso (1604–1683), in his work *Las Excelencias de los Hebreos*, likewise systematically contradicts unfounded beliefs concerning the Jewish inclination to certain diseases and then states that "if there is one disease which can be considered as a unique property of the Hebrews, it is the black bile". Cardoso also attributes the relatively high frequency of melancholy among the Jews to the "deprivation and persecutions they experience in their exile" and to their stressful existence. See Yshac Cardoso, *Ma'alot Ha'ivriyim* (trans. Yosef Kaplan; Jerusalem, 1972), 62 (in Hebrew).

<sup>43</sup> Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Hayyim*, 58<sup>v</sup>.



in order to monitor changes, especially in pulse rate, in reaction to one of the names mentioned.<sup>44</sup>

Zahalon mentions only two pathological symptoms: sunken eyes, characterized by lack of tears and rapid flickering, and wailing voices. The eyes were indeed considered not only “the window by which love enters to attack,”<sup>45</sup> but also the first indication of the existence of the pathology, due to their sunken appearance, brought about by dryness, insomnia, and lingering in dark places.<sup>46</sup> Wailing and withdrawing into dark places were symptoms characteristic of lycanthropy, which was associated with love-sickness and melancholy.<sup>47</sup> Other than that, states Zahalon, “[the patient] is otherwise perfect in body,” but his “reason is not as it used to be.”<sup>48</sup>

This statement, I believe, is of great importance. In its concise style, it reveals Zahalon’s evaluation of the physical damage experienced by the lovesick patient, which is quite negligible. However, it highlights (in accordance with the location of the discussion in the book) that the real drama occurs in the head and is expressed by damage to the patient’s reason. Zahalon, in accordance with the book’s intentions and character, did not elaborate regarding this mental state, which is extensively discussed in contemporary medical literature, and focuses mainly on sadness, fear, delusions, impaired judgment, insomnia, and nightmares.<sup>49</sup> He also refrained from elaborating on the disease’s terrible prognosis as other physicians did. “Desire can result in madness, despair, and suicide,” writes Montalto.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, one of the case studies of lovesickness described by Amatus Lusitanus in his *Centuriæ*, did result in a suicide, with the patient drinking a bottle of vitriol after realizing that he could not be together with his beloved.<sup>51</sup> This is the reason, explains Montalto, that “physicians must treat lovers’ madness as soon as possible, before the disease enters a chronic stage.”<sup>52</sup> Notwithstanding the brevity of Zahalon’s description

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<sup>44</sup> See for example Ferrand, *De la maladie d’amour*, 80–84; Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 723.

<sup>45</sup> Ferrand, *A Treatise on Lovesickness*, 233.

<sup>46</sup> See for example Ferrand, *De la maladie d’amour*, 84, 98–102; Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 550–51; Montalto, *Archipathologia*, 383.

<sup>47</sup> On lycanthropy and its association with melancholy, see Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression*, 345–51.

<sup>48</sup> Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Ḥayyim*, 58<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> See for example Ferrand, *De la maladie d’amour*, 26; Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 728–29; Montalto, *Archipathologia*, 382–83.

<sup>50</sup> Montalto, *Archipathologia*, 386.

<sup>51</sup> Amatus Lusitanus, *Curationum medicinalium centuriæ septem*, 543.

<sup>52</sup> Montalto, *Archipathologia*, 386.

of the disease, he not only included lovesickness in this popular self-help book, but also offered six different therapeutic techniques. The first of these is “giving [the patient] the desired [love] object,”<sup>53</sup> which thus emphasizes the nonphysiological nature of the phenomenon, consistent with his statement regarding the pathological state of the patient. Though all non-Jewish physicians were in decisive agreement as to this treatment being “the last and best cure”<sup>54</sup> for this pathological situation, it was often restricted by having to be in accord “with divine and human laws”;<sup>55</sup> hence, it was usually offered only as a final option, after presentation of the surgical and dietary treatments for the disease.

Zahalon’s short and blunt opening statement, which introduces the various treatments for lovesickness, is therefore quite an important indication of his standpoint regarding this disease and its etiology. Similarly, Zacutus Lusitanus wrote that the best cure for “melancholy that arises from love” is the consummation of the love itself, and that it is only in situations where “the lover cannot consummate his desire, [that] one has to seek a medical solution”;<sup>56</sup> he thus implies, like Zahalon, that this pathological condition has social and emotional roots, and could, or perhaps even should, be solved without medical interference.

Interestingly, Zahalon offers a similar recommendation for the treatment of “woman’s madness due to uterine fury,” the clinical picture of which, as presented by the physician, is manifested in symptoms quite similar to those produced by lovesickness in the general medical discourse. Zahalon writes that “if she can bed lawfully, this is her cure.”<sup>57</sup> In this case, Zahalon does not refer to love but instead to the ability to consummate a sexual relationship, yet his use of the term “lawfully” indicates his view that the recommended activity must be anchored in a marriage bond.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Hayyim*, 58<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 798.

<sup>55</sup> Ferrand, *A Treatise on Lovesickness*, 334; see also André du Laurens, *A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight* (trans. R. Surphlet; London, 1599), 122.

<sup>56</sup> Zacutus Lusitanus, *De medicorum principum historia*, 80.

<sup>57</sup> Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Hayyim*, 89<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> Amatus’s description of a case of “uterinus furor” also bears a resemblance to lovesickness. Amatus discussed the case of a thirty-five year old abbess who began to manifest restlessness and hallucinations, expressing rage at her parents who had locked her away against her will when she wished to marry her lover. Although Amatus described a therapeutic procedure which included various physiological treatments, he concluded that the best therapy was to confront the roots of the disease, and he advised maintaining “regular sexual activity within the limits of a steady and harmonious marriage.” In spite of the different diagnostic category, both the etiology and the recommended therapy in this case were identical to those described above as being indicated for lovesickness in Jewish and

Zahalon further continued his therapeutic advice regarding lovesickness with a short statement that it is worthwhile for a lovesick patient “to occupy himself with matters of greater importance.”<sup>59</sup> It can be safely assumed that it was the book’s genre that again prevented him from elaborating on the vanities of love and of various pleasures, habitually presented in contemporary medical love discourse. Zahalon presumably intended a contrast between such “vanities” and the aforementioned “matters of greater importance.” One should also consider the etiological implications of being a person who has the time to dwell on love matters. Both Robert Burton and Jacques Ferrand argue that idle men, who have the leisure to spend their time thinking (an activity which dries and cools the mind and thus exacerbates the melancholic condition), are most prone to the disease.<sup>60</sup>

Zahalon also suggests that the patient be made to “concentrate on a certain defect of his love object,”<sup>61</sup> yet another common piece of advice

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non-Jewish medical literature regarding that illness. On the other hand, it is worth noting that according to Amatus, a bond based on marriage, even if harmonious, would not necessarily testify as to the existence of love, see Amatus Lusitanus, *Curationum medicinalium centuriæ duæ quinta et sexta* (Lyon, 1564), 558–61. Even though Zahalon’s descriptions might seem to the modern reader to be differentiated representations of the same pathology on the basis of gender, it is important to highlight here that early modern discourse regarding lovesickness (non-Jewish and Jewish alike) was not limited to either men or women, even though some symptoms were attributed to men and others to women. In the case of Zahalon’s discussion, one might argue that his references to a male lovesick patient are an example of an association of the disease solely with men. However, this is not the case, since all pathologies discussed in the book (except for those specifically associated with women, which are mentioned in the eleventh part of the book) are expressed in the same fashion, i.e., using the third person masculine. Nevertheless, it should not necessarily be presumed that the term “lawfully” refers only to the context of a marriage, since there is evidence that prostitution may have been legitimated within Jewish communities of the time; though this option is indeed reserved solely for men. For example, there are concrete references to Jewish prostitution in the writing of Rabbi Jacob Ḥagiz who lived in Livorno towards the middle of the seventeenth century. For his complete comments, see Avraham Tennenbaum, “‘If You Should See Among Them an Attractive Woman Whom You Wish to Take as a Wife’: Making Peace with Evil, Beauty, and Gambling” *Parashat ha-Shavua* 222 (2005): 2–3 (in Hebrew). For a more general discussion of prostitution in the Jewish communities in Italy and of liaisons between Italian Jewish men and non-Jewish prostitutes, see Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 111–12; and Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe* (trans. J. Chipman; Waltham, 2004), 139–40.

<sup>59</sup> Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Ḥayyim*, 58<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> Ferrand, *De la maladie d’amour*, 46–47; Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 662.

<sup>61</sup> Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Ḥayyim*, 58<sup>v</sup>.

from contemporary medical discourse, hinting at the impaired rationality and judgment of the lovesick.<sup>62</sup>

Zahalon notes that if no distractions proved to be effective in a particular case, the patient should be required to stay away from the love object and even to “change his place and move to another city, so he should not gaze at her and not walk nearby.”<sup>63</sup> Maintaining a physical distance between the lovers was indeed one of the main therapeutic elements indicated in both the non-Jewish and the Jewish medical discussions of the disease since, as Robert Burton beautifully describes it, “Who can stand by a fire and not burn?”<sup>64</sup> However, Zahalon’s own recommendation that a patient should change residence is not only radical but remarkable, given the socioeconomic status of the majority of Italian Jewry. This statement highlights the severity with which Zahalon considered the condition, despite his concise style. It might also constitute an indication that his own lovesick patients were usually members of a particularly high socioeconomic status within the Italian Jewish communities.

Zahalon considered medical alternatives only after recommending the social and emotional treatments listed above. These medical solutions consist solely of a particular diet and surgical intervention. Here, however, Zahalon’s dissociation of the disease from melancholy is evident. While Zacutus and Montalto, for example, suggest the same treatment for the lovesick patient as that recommended for a melancholic one—that is, liquids and plenty of sleep<sup>65</sup>—Zahalon counsels that the patient’s diet should be cold and relatively dry. He further recommends fluids made out of lettuce and purslane, and states that the lovesick person should avoid hot and moist food.<sup>66</sup> This line of thinking implies that Zahalon understood that the treatment should deal with the patient’s “hot” desire rather than with any chronic melancholic condition.<sup>67</sup> He also refrained from recommending any pharmaceutical remedies, such as the use of various

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<sup>62</sup> See for example Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 779–96; Montalto, *Archipathologia*, 387–88.

<sup>63</sup> Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Hayyim*, 58<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 770.

<sup>65</sup> Zacutus Lusitanus, *Praxis historiarum* (Lyon, 1657), 213; Montalto, *Archipathologia*, 389.

<sup>66</sup> Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Hayyim*, 58<sup>v</sup>. Purslane is an edible annual succulent, from the *Portulacaceae* family, and was very commonly used in Arab medicine. See, for example, Hassan Azaizeh et al., “The State of the Art of Traditional Arab Herbal Medicine in the Eastern Region of the Mediterranean: A Review,” *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* 3:2 (2006): 230.

<sup>67</sup> Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Hayyim*, 58<sup>v</sup>.

laxatives, which was a prevalent treatment for lovesickness, in order to evacuate from the body any excess of the black melancholy bile. Zahalon completes his list of possible treatments by recommending bloodletting.

Zahalon's discussion of lovesickness is a perfect example of his writing style as well as of his therapeutic approach. The question "How does one cure lovesickness?" is answered in only nine lines, in which he offers six different kinds of treatment. These suggested treatments reflect both his classical, theoretical medical knowledge and his practical and popular approach. When describing the various pathologies covered in the book, Zahalon refers neither to the details of their clinical descriptions nor to his therapeutic recommendations; instead, he advises the reader to refer to the theoretical sections of the book for further discussion. Thus, while mentioning the fact that a lovesick patient could be expected to have an accelerated pulse, a further discussion of the subject is to be found only in the third section of the book, devoted to various pulse rates.<sup>68</sup> His concise recommendation that bloodletting be applied to lovesick patients does not include concrete instructions regarding this practice, because the various instructions concerning bloodletting (i.e., the manner in which it should be carried out in reference to the patient's age and physical stamina or to the various phases of the disease being treated) are described in the section devoted to bloodletting.<sup>69</sup> An elaboration of his dietary recommendations to the lovesick is also provided in a different section of the book, dealing with the characteristics of a healthy regimen.<sup>70</sup> While Zahalon notes only briefly that lovesick patients should refrain from drinking wine, it is in the dietary section of the book that he notes that even though wine has various advantages, it should never be served to "young men with a hot and dry nature."<sup>71</sup> Thus, indirectly, and in conformity with the book's lack of etiological explanations, Zahalon makes a connection between lovesickness and the age of those stricken with it, a factor which, as noted earlier, is critical to an analysis of the disease's social roots.

The terseness of Zahalon's description of lovesickness, as well as the lack of reference to a tragic prognosis, should not mislead us to believe that the physician belittled the severity of the condition. Yet it is precisely the characteristics of the book's genre that prevent us from estimating the degree to which the pathology was widespread among his patients.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 21–22.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 37–38.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 1–3.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 2<sup>r</sup>.

However, the inclusion of this pathology in a self-help book of this kind, as well as his failure to refer to any association of the disease with the popular diagnosis of melancholy, seem to me an indication of the actual prevalence of the phenomenon among his target audience. It should be recalled that his objective in writing about the various diseases was to offer concrete and immediate treatment for actual cases of sickness—in this case, resulting from unfulfilled love—and not necessarily to conform to a particular trend that was currently popular in the medical field. We must now look beyond the medical literature and consider the social aspects of love and marriage among early modern Italian Jewry—the book's intended readers—in order to offer possible social explanations for the inclusion of this discussion in the book.

*Anchoring Lovesickness among Early Modern Italian Jewry*

Early modern Italian Jewry has been, and still is, the subject of extensive research. The last two fruitful decades of research on the social and emotional aspects of Jewish family life and Jewish marriage rituals have not omitted the study of Italian Jewish communities. The traditional view of the issue of love and marriage among early modern European Jewry has been represented by the pioneering research of Jacob Katz on the Ashkenazi family.<sup>72</sup> Katz described a patriarchal family structure, in which parents “were given the say in making a match,” and in which “personal compatibility, never mind romantic attachment, was not taken into account at all.”<sup>73</sup> Katz further noted that “clandestine betrothals (*kiddushin*)” among the young, on the basis of mutual affection, were condemned and considered a violation of the social order, as can be seen from numerous discussions of the subject in the *responsa* literature.<sup>74</sup> This traditional standpoint has been somewhat restrained in more recent research, which tends to highlight a less patriarchal model of the Jewish family; while recent studies acknowledge that parents generally controlled marriage, it has been argued that this control was not absolute

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<sup>72</sup> Jacob Katz, “Marriage and Sexual Life among the Jews at the End of the Middle Ages,” *Zion* 10 (1944): 21–54 (in Hebrew); idem, “Family, Kinship, and Marriage among Ashkenazim in the 16th–18th Centuries,” *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 1 (1959): 4–22; idem, *Tradition and Crisis* (New York, 1961), 135–56.

<sup>73</sup> Katz, “Family, Kinship, and Marriage,” 6, 9.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

and that the degree of freedom practiced within familial and social systems allowed the possibility of marriages based on love.<sup>75</sup>

In regard to early modern Italian Jewry, Robert Bonfil upheld a strictly patriarchal view of the family in his *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*; he asserted that “marriage fitted into the rigid patriarchal system” and that “in our period [the Renaissance] nobody married for love.”<sup>76</sup> Ariel Toaff argued that, as is evident from contemporary documents, “marriage remained a matter for family choice, linked to strategies and policies of an economic and religious nature,” and that free choice of one’s marriage partner was considered an actual threat to the social order.<sup>77</sup> Though one must pay attention to the differences among the various Italian communities—and for the purposes of this study, one must give particular attention to the Jewish communities of Rome and Ferrara in which Zahalon’s clinical experience was acquired—it is clear that certain issues were central to all early modern Italian Jewish communities. Combating the practice of clandestine marriages, which indicated a free emotional choice made by the young couple and a conflict with parental control of marriage, was certainly one of these issues. In June 1554, a congress of delegates from the Jewish communities of Italy met in Ferrara; the group included rabbis from Rome, Ferrara, Padua, Mantua, Bologna, and the other communities of Emilia Romagna. The delegates mandated severe punishments for “anyone who gives *kiddushin* to a woman without the presence of ten people unless it be with the consent of her father and mother. . . .”<sup>78</sup> This legislation should not be taken lightly, especially in view of the Jewish tradition of consensual marriage, based on individual and emotional involvement, from Talmudic to early modern times.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> See for example David Biale, “Love, Marriage, and the Modernization of the Jews,” in *Approaches to Modern Judaism* (ed. M. L. Raphael; Chico, Calif., 1983), 1–17.

<sup>76</sup> Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 257, 259.

<sup>77</sup> Ariel Toaff, *Love, Work, and Death: Jewish Life in Medieval Umbria* (trans. J. Landry; London, 1996), 6; see also Kenneth R. Stow, “Marriages are Made in Heaven: Marriage and the Individual in the Roman Jewish Ghetto,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 48:3: 453; Roni Weinstein, *Marriage Rituals Italian Style: A Historical Anthropological Perspective on Early Modern Italian Jewry* (Leiden, 2004), 73–90, 100–112.

<sup>78</sup> Louis Finkelstein, *Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1924), 304; for a discussion of the Ferrara ordinance, see Abraham H. Freimann, *Seder Kiddushin ve-Nissuin* (Jerusalem, 1964), 138–40 (in Hebrew); on clandestine betrothals among early modern Italian Jewry, see Howard T. Adelman, “Law and Love: The Jewish Family in Early Modern Italy,” *Continuity and Change* 16:2 (2001): 285–87.

<sup>79</sup> On the Jewish tradition of affectionate and harmonious marriages based on mutual consent, see Adiel Schremer, *Male and Female He Created Them: Jewish Marriage in the Late Second Temple, Mishnah and Talmud Periods* (Jerusalem, 2003), 136–42, 344 (in



Kenneth Stow, who has studied thousands of acts drawn up by Jewish rabbinic notaries, from 1536 to 1640 and depicted the daily and private life of Roman Jews on the basis of these documents, has claimed that the Jewish community in Rome was characterized first and foremost by individual initiative.<sup>80</sup> In respect to marriages in the Roman Jewish community, Stow makes two main arguments. First, he suggests that as individuals, youths had at least the right to veto undesirable marriages, if not the possibility to actually choose their mates, by applying the halakhic rule of *me'un* (refusal to marry).<sup>81</sup> Second, he argues that with the exercise of this right of refusal, the barriers separating the various Jewish ethnic groups in Rome broke down, resulting in social amalgamation; and here Stow highlights the relatively high rate of "out-marriages" (i.e., marriages between different Jewish ethnic groups) in the Roman community.<sup>82</sup> This situation is quite different from that encountered in the northern Italian Jewish communities, where the social strata were distinguished by various ethnic groups of distinct socioeconomic classes.<sup>83</sup> This observation may be reinforced by one of Amatus Lusitanus's cases of lovesickness. The case, titled "Of a Jewish lad fallen in love with a Jewish girl," tells the story of a young man whose body was "burnt" by love to the point that he became insane.

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Hebrew); Kenneth R. Stow, "The Jewish Family in the Rhineland in the High Middle Ages: Form and Function," *American Historical Review* 92:5 (1987): 1103; idem, "Marriages are Made in Heaven," 459; the aforementioned ordinance from 1554 bears a resemblance to the Catholic policy on clandestine marriages that was to be articulated at the Council of Trent in 1563, according to which marriages were to be authorized only when a ceremony was performed in the presence of a priest and witnesses. The ordinance also resembles a series of French edicts and ordinances from the second half of the sixteenth century, according to which the age of consent was significantly raised, and which stated that both a couple who married clandestinely and those who gave them assistance would be guilty of a crime and severely punished. On the French legislation regarding clandestine marriages, see Altbauer-Rudnik, "Love, Madness, and Social Order," 41–42.

<sup>80</sup> These documents (known unofficially as the *Notai ebrei*) are held at the *Archivio Storico Capitolino* in Rome. Many of these have been translated from Hebrew into English in Kenneth R. Stow, *The Jews in Rome* (2 vols.; Leiden, 1997); see also idem, *Theater of Acculturation: The Roman Ghetto in the Sixteenth Century* (Seattle, 2001). On the Jewish community in Rome, see also idem, *Jewish Life in Early Modern Rome: Challenge, Conversion, and Private Life* (Aldershot, 2007).

<sup>81</sup> Stow, *The Jews in Rome*, 1:xiii; Stow presented this topic *in extenso* in his "Innovation through Conservatism: *Me'un* (Refusal to Marry) in the Roman Ghetto in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Sexuality and the Family in History: Collected Essays* (ed. I. Bartal and I. Gafni; Jerusalem, 1998), 131–43 (in Hebrew).

<sup>82</sup> Stow, *The Jews in Rome*, 1:xliv–xlvi; Stow presented his arguments regarding this issue in his "Out-marriage and Immigration: Sixteenth Century Roman Jewry," *Pe'amim* 51 (spring 1992): 99–106 (in Hebrew).

<sup>83</sup> See for example David Joshua Malkiel, *A Separate Republic: The Mechanics and Dynamics of Venetian Jewish Self-Government, 1607–1624* (Jerusalem, 1991), 13–15, 92–117.



The patient and his love object are specifically described as Jewish, yet in his description of the case, Amatus disclosed the fact that the patient was “a young man from Thessaloniki.” Since Amatus migrated to Thessaloniki only in the late 1550s and since this entire *Centuria* is based on his Italian experience, the most reasonable explanation is that the youth was originally from Thessaloniki, and that he had fallen in love with a Jewish girl while in Italy—which would explain why there was a need to indicate the young man’s origin specifically, while nothing needed to be said of the girl’s origins. Such liaisons were certainly possible, since many of the Italian Jewish communities, especially those of Venice and Ancona, where Amatus had resided for several years,<sup>84</sup> had close commercial and cultural relations with the Greek Jewish communities, and especially with the Jewish community of Thessaloniki. Furthermore, many Greek Jews had settled in Venice, and had established that city’s Levantine Jewish community.<sup>85</sup> Marriage contracts between descendants of the Italian and Greek Jewish communities were the subject of many controversies, as can be seen in the rabbinical *responsa* literature of the time as well as in Amatus’s case, in which the girl’s father brought about the imprisonment of the lovesick patient by the local authorities.

The overall economic conditions of the Jewish community of Rome were quite different from those of the other Italian Jewish communities.<sup>86</sup> Thus, in Rome, socioeconomic considerations regarding marriage within the community were uppermost. The aforementioned ethnic amalgamation in the Jewish community of Rome was probably enabled by the will

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<sup>84</sup> Amatus Lusitanus, *Curationum medicinalium centuriæ septem*, 309; for a more comprehensive presentation of Amatus’s cases of lovesickness as well as of his biography, see Michal Altbauer-Rudnik, *Prescribing Love: Italian Jewish Physicians Writing on Lovesickness in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Jerusalem, 2009), 16–21, 33–54.

<sup>85</sup> During the first half of the sixteenth century, many Levantine Jews, mainly merchants, started to settle in Italian cities, especially Venice. See Robert Bonfil, “Italy—A Bridge between West and East and East and West,” in *The Sephardic Jewish Diaspora after the Expulsion from Spain* (ed. M. Abitbol et al.; Jerusalem, 1992), 83–87 (in Hebrew); Yosef Kaplan, *The Western Sephardi Diaspora* (Tel Aviv, 1994), 38 (in Hebrew); Malkiel, *A Separate Republic*, 14–15. On the commercial and cultural relations between Ancona Jewry and Thessaloniki Jewry, see Yosef Laras, “The Family of Mujajion in Ancona,” *Sefunot* 12 (1971–1978): 255–70 (in Hebrew); Zippora Baruchson, “On the Trade in Hebrew Books between Italy and the Ottoman Empire during the Sixteenth Century,” *East and Maghreb* 5 (1986): 53–77 (in Hebrew); and Yaron Ben-Na’eh, “The City of Torah and Learning: Salonika as a Center of Learning in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Pe’amim* 80 (1999): 69–71 (in Hebrew).

<sup>86</sup> One has also to keep in mind a more balanced economic situation of the Roman Jews, or as Stow puts it “there were rich Jews at least up to 1682 when all Roman Jewish ‘banks’ were formally closed,” see Stow, *Jewish Life in Early Modern Rome*, xviii.

to preserve socioeconomic barriers, which predominated over interethnic concerns.<sup>87</sup> This is usually referred to as class endogamy. It would be safe to assume that cases of young lovesick patients did exist among the higher socioeconomic classes of the Roman community, all the more so in light of the fact that individual emotional considerations were taken account of in the lower-ranking parts of the Jewish society. It is also important to mention contemporary criticism against the class endogamy that characterized parental attitudes towards marriage; note, for example, Rabbi Aharon Berechia of Modena's statement from 1626 against wealthy fathers who prevent their daughters from marrying *talmidei ḥakhamim* (disciples of the wise).<sup>88</sup> This is all the more true in the case of the Jewish community of Ferrara which, notwithstanding the lack of a full-length study, was by far more well-to-do than the one in Rome.<sup>89</sup> As applied to these descendants of upper class families, Zahalon's advice to change residence seems more reasonable. This was also the social class with more leisure time to dwell on emotional issues, and thus the logical target for Zahalon's advice to concentrate on matters of greater importance.

One may also learn about the cultural contours of marriage by looking at the actions taken by its targets, the youth. Roni Weinstein argues that "unquestionably, the family was the dominant factor in decisions regarding marriage partners."<sup>90</sup> He describes the increase in clandestine betrothals during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as part of what he defines as a "youth subculture." He brings exquisite contemporary evidence, such as the case of Shlomit, daughter of Divri of Ferrara, who had fallen in love with Zimri, although her parents had arranged a marriage for her with Naphtali: "[N]ow there is no peace between them, because of the ugly things he [Naphtali] was told and because she yearned for her beloved [Zimri]."<sup>91</sup> However, one should keep in mind that unless publicly exposed, the majority of affairs of this kind probably remained undocumented, out of the fear of a scandal.

When considering lovesick patients among Italian Jewry, one should also take into account the possibility of mutual affection that might have arisen between Jews and Christians. Even though "young men were

<sup>87</sup> Stow, *The Jews in Rome*, 1:xlvi.

<sup>88</sup> Interestingly enough he praises Ashkenazim for encouraging such marriages; see Aharon Berechia of Modena, *Sefer Ma'avar Yabbok* (Amsterdam, 1732), Chapter 14, 4th dissertation, unpaginated.

<sup>89</sup> Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 77.

<sup>90</sup> Weinstein, *Marriage Rituals Italian Style*, 75.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 330–31.

aware that their very future as Jews was conditional upon their choosing a Jewish wife" and that this was "required by the religious rules to which they were bound," as Toaff clarifies, "it was the young Christian girls whom they met...that attracted their attention...[and] stirred up fantasies and desires."<sup>92</sup> Even though canon law forbade sexual relations between Christians and Jews, and enforced this prohibition by severe punishments, many references in both Jewish and non-Jewish sources show that this was a not uncommon phenomenon.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to the foregoing social circumstances, one should bear in mind the above-noted arguments concerning the will of the individual.<sup>94</sup> The fact that one had the ability to refuse a prospective partner should not be underestimated. This right of refusal may help to explain the absence of references to lovesickness among married couples in Jewish writings on the disease, and specifically in Zahalon's discussion. This is despite the prevalence of the discussion in early modern non-Jewish medical discourse on the subject. Lovesickness among married couples might arise when hatred and jealousy between the husband and the wife developed within the context of forced marriages, or as a result of the frustration on the part of either the husband or the wife because of the impossibility of being with his or her true love.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, one should consider here the option to divorce, which was absent in the Catholic world and was still uncommon in Protestant spheres. Stow, for example, refers to a story of a Roman Jew, a married father, who fell madly in love with another woman and divorced his wife.<sup>96</sup> Notwithstanding the restrictions on taking the initiative in choosing a partner, the absence of forced marriages, as well as the option to divorce, seems to have lessened the possibility of

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<sup>92</sup> Toaff, *Love, Work, and Death*, 6.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–11; Cecil Roth in his classic *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia, 1959), 44–45, referred to a specific case of a Jewish girl who was burned in Rome during the seventeenth century, as a result of a love affair with a local young noble. On the issue of marriage and conversion see Toaff, *Love, Work, and Death*, 32–35; on the possibility that liaisons of this kind were prompted by the Church in Rome in expectation of conversion and marriage, as part of an overall missionary endeavor, see Piet van Boxel, "Dowry and the Conversion of the Jews in Sixteenth-Century Rome: Competition between the Church and the Jewish Community," in *Marriage in Italy, 1300–1650* (ed. T. Dean and K. J. P. Lowe; Cambridge, 1998), 116–27.

<sup>94</sup> See Stow, "Marriages are Made in Heaven," 445–91, and above, nn. 81–82.

<sup>95</sup> See for example Ferrand, *De la maladie d'amour*, 210–21; Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 821–66.

<sup>96</sup> Cited in Stow, "The Jewish Woman as Social Protagonist: Jewish Women in Sixteenth-Century Rome," *Le donne delle minoranze* (ed. Claire E. Honess and Verina R. Jones; Turin, 1999), 93 n. 21.

lovesickness among married couples, and might explain the lack of medical discussions on the subject.

Apart from the actual social reality of early modern Italian Jewry, one should also take into account the reciprocal role of literature in shaping the disease and being shaped by it, in terms of themes and genres. While literary examples are most likely fictional, existing only on stage or in books, they can be taken to reflect the interests of their audiences, their hardships, and their ideals, and as such, they may provide an indication of the social tensions and personal distress surrounding love and marriage.<sup>97</sup> However, reading love stories or love poetry might itself have given rise to romantic ideals. This psychogenic nature of literature was already recognized in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' medical discourse on lovesickness; as can be seen, for example, in the writings of Burton or Montalto, who claimed that reading love stories and listening to love poetry gave rise to lovesickness and were therefore very dangerous.<sup>98</sup> Zahalon himself referred to the psychogenic nature of literature when describing the symptoms of the "woman's madness due to uterine fury," mentioned above, which bears a strong resemblance to lovesickness. One of the symptoms of the disease, according to Zahalon, is an uncontrollable desire for sexual intercourse, brought about mainly by "reading stories that deal with love and longings."<sup>99</sup>

In considering literature as a reflector and shaper of social trends, it is worthwhile to draw particular attention to the reemergence of Hebrew secular poetry in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy, especially the love sonnets of Yosef Tzarfati (Giuseppe Gallo, d. 1527), Moshe ben Yoav (d. 1530), Jacob Francès (1615–1667) and his brother Immanuel Francès (1618–1710).<sup>100</sup> It is also important to take note of the ambivalent attitude expressed towards these works in the wider culture: large portions of the

<sup>97</sup> It is worthwhile mentioning here a present-day trend emphasizing the role of literary examples for the study of emotions in general and love in particular; see, for example, Jon Elster, *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions* (Cambridge, 1999); and Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>98</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 695. Montalto's reference to the impact of literature is especially interesting, since he elaborated upon the connection between listening to love poetry and the physical manifestation of the disease; see Montalto, *Archipathologia*, 384.

<sup>99</sup> Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Hayyim*, 89<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>100</sup> For a full representation of the renewal of the Hebrew sonnet in sixteenth century Italy see Dvora Bregman, "The Emergence of the Hebrew Sonnet," *Prooftexts* 11 (1991): 231–39; eadem, *The Golden Way: The Hebrew Sonnet during the Renaissance and the Baroque*

Francès brothers' poetry were not published until the twentieth century, and many of those who engaged in love poetry felt the need to conceal it by the use of cipher, or to adopt an apologetic attitude towards it, maintaining that erotic themes had occupied them only when they were young. This tendency is further illustrated by the ambivalent attitude in the early modern era towards the famous sonnets of Immanuel of Rome (ca. 1261–1330), which were characterized by highly erotic themes, and which adopted the tactic of concealing love and erotic poetry within the customary and acceptable genre of marriage sonnets.<sup>101</sup>

*A Comedy of Betrothal* (*Tsaḥut B'diḥuta D'Kiddushin*), written by Yehudah Sommo (Leone de Sommi, 1527–1592) in the second half of the sixteenth century, serves as good illustration not only of the social conventions regulating love and marriage, but also of the emotional involvement experienced by the youth of the time; in its own way it presents a critique of the social control exercised by parents and rabbis through the formal procedures of *kiddushin*.<sup>102</sup> The play, which is the earliest complete Hebrew play known to us,<sup>103</sup> tells the story of two young couples, both secretly in love—Jedidiah and Beruriah, Asael and Shifrah—whose separate romantic affairs (which include sexual relations in one case and clandestine betrothal in the other) collide with the marital strategies employed by their parents. The parents engage a local lawyer, Master Greedy, in order to enforce their will upon the young people, sometimes

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(Jerusalem and Beer-Sheva, 1995), 84–98 (in Hebrew), 162–71; Dan Pagis, *Change and Tradition in the Secular Poetry: Spain and Italy* (Jerusalem, 1976), 247–88 (in Hebrew).

<sup>101</sup> Bregman, *The Golden Way*, 162–63; see also Weinstein's discussion of the alternative way in which the Song of Songs was viewed in sixteenth century Italy, "as a real love story alluding in many of its details to stories of young love and courtship" (rather than as an allegory, as is usual in rabbinic tradition); see idem, *Marriage Rituals Italian Style*, 332–33.

<sup>102</sup> Yehudah Sommo, *Tsaḥut B'diḥuta D'Kiddushin* (ed. J. Hayyim Schirmann; Jerusalem, 1946) (in Hebrew). For an English translation see above n. 1; for a general survey of the play, see Abraham M. Habermann, *A History of Hebrew Liturgical and Secular Poetry* (Givatayim and Ramat-Gan, 1972), 2:74–80 (in Hebrew); see also Weinstein's discussion of the play as a prototype of the characteristics of the aforementioned "youth subculture" in his *Marriage Rituals Italian Style*, 345–50.

<sup>103</sup> Interestingly enough, the only Hebrew precedent in regard to playwriting is the translation into Hebrew of Fernando de Rojas's *La Celestina* (1499), made by Yosef Tzarfati at the beginning of the sixteenth century. *La Celestina*'s tragic plot, which exemplifies social stratification and is filled with lovesick youth is an interesting choice for Tzarfati, a poet and a physician, and might be a further evidence of the themes that occupied early modern Italian Jewry. On *La Celestina* and lovesickness, see, for example, Frederick A. de Armas, "La Celestina: An Example of Love Melancholy," *Romanic Review* 66 (1975): 288–95; Ricardo Castells, *Fernando de Rojas and the Renaissance Vision: Phantasm, Melancholy, and Didacticism in Celestina* (University Park, Pa., 2000), 47–62.

specifically labeled as lovesick in the course of the play. There is also a romantic subplot involving the servants, in which case there are no real barriers to overcome. The play terminates, however, in a happy ending that perpetuates the romantic choices of the young people in the bond of marriage.

In considering all these literary examples as well as the possible influence of non-Jewish literary love themes, we need to take into account the likely range of potential Jewish readers. Here again, it is most probable, as suggested by recent research on the libraries of early modern Italian Jewry,<sup>104</sup> that such readers were confined to the upper socioeconomic strata of the Jewish communities, which, as we have seen, were also considered the most prone to lovesickness.

### *Conclusion*

Early modern European medical discourse of lovesickness thrived because it had found an “ecological niche,” to borrow Ian Hacking’s terminology. This niche allowed the patient’s suffering to be classified within an existing medical diagnostic system, and in its basis there was indeed “certain cultural polarity” regarding love and its place in marriage. Early modern lovesickness is configured as an example of what Hacking defines as “transient mental illness,” which “appears in certain times and places, and later fades away,” and which was indeed restricted to a certain social class.<sup>105</sup> Is it possible that lovesickness played the same role in early modern Italian Jewish society? One certainly cannot claim that Zahalon’s short discussion is an indication that the incidence of lovesickness had reached epidemic proportions, as happened in the case of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French aristocracy. Furthermore, apart from Zahalon, the only Italian Jewish physician who writes of lovesickness is Amatus Lusitanus; although this seeming lack of attention to the issue needs to be contextualized within the overall scarcity of medical writing of any sort by Italian Jewish physicians.<sup>106</sup> However, in light of Zahalon’s declared

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<sup>104</sup> Baruchson, *Books and Readers*, 155–59, 176–84.

<sup>105</sup> Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 1–2.

<sup>106</sup> Notwithstanding his Venetian episodes, Montalto’s treatise on lovesickness primarily reflects the Parisian medical discourse of lovesickness, with which he became acquainted while serving as court physician to Marie de Medici, as I argue in Altbauer-Rudnik, *Prescribing Love*, 21–27, 54–61.

objectives and the book's genre, Zahalon's short Hebrew discussion of lovesickness is especially interesting: the pathologies that he deals with in the book were most probably widespread among the book's intended Italian Jewish readers; the book offers to those readers immediate treatments for the diseases from which they tended to suffer. The clinical experience that Zahalon had acquired in Rome and in Ferrara, and the lively and popular anecdotes that he provided in his book, reflect the concrete social reality in which his medical practice and writing took shape; a society in which he was also a rabbi and a preacher, not just a physician. The book does not provide an elevated or fashionable theoretical or philosophical medical discussion of all types of diseases, but it does provide evidence of the most common pathologies among the Italian Jewish communities of Zahalon's era.

This short medical discussion provides us with an additional prism by which to view the complexity of the issues of love and marriage within the social context of early modern Italian Jewry. Zahalon's inclusion of the discussion of lovesickness, characterized by practical conciseness, as well as careful and unique therapeutic advice, serves as evidence of a less dichotomizing presentation of the social reality in regard to love (i.e. forced marriages versus free choice based on mutual affection). Whether one should consider Zahalon's presentation of lovesickness and its treatment as a refined critique of a social reality characterized by parental control over the choice of marriage partners for the young, is indeed too much of a guess. However, his discussion of lovesickness in a popular medical instruction book may testify to the existence of a love-related pathology among early modern Italian Jewry, while his pragmatic therapeutic advice attests to his understanding of the interwoven emotional and social components of the disorder.





PART THREE

KNOWLEDGE OF NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS



## RELIGIOUS RITUALS AND ETHNOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE: SIXTEENTH-CENTURY DESCRIPTIONS OF CIRCUMCISION

Yaacov Deutsch

A new literary genre that appeared in Europe at the end of the fifteenth century focused on the description of the everyday life of people from other cultures and nations, and especially of their customs and ceremonies. Books belonging to this genre include firsthand information not only about the history of various nations and about their lands, but also about aspects of their social life. Thus in these books one can find information about social and cultural institutions, education, and gender divisions. In addition, these books provide information about more mundane issues such as professions, architecture, agriculture, food and drink, and clothing. Another aspect touched upon by these books was the religious sphere—encompassing religious beliefs and institutions as well as religious customs and rituals.

This new literary genre was related to different phenomena that affected and shaped Europe from the late Middle Ages. The “discoveries” of hitherto unknown lands and peoples led to a proliferation of accounts about these places and their inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> Scholars who have studied the history of science and art have shown that a major trend that characterizes the early modern period is the importance given to direct observation.<sup>2</sup> In the scientific world, a major place was given to observation as a critical tool for the scientist, and this led to the publication of books that identify and

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the seminal work of Margaret Traube Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1964), which is still of great value, there are several important works from recent years, among them: Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World from the Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, 1993); Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250–1625* (Cambridge, 2000); idem, *Travellers and Cosmographers: Studies in the History of Early Modern Travel and Ethnology* (London, 2007); Almut Höfert, *Den Feind beschreiben: “Türkengefahr” und europäisches Wissen über das Osmanische Reich 1450–1600* (Frankfurt, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago, 1983), 72–118; Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *The Mastery of Nature: Aspects of Art, Science, and Humanism in the Renaissance* (Princeton, 1993).

classify plants and animals;<sup>3</sup> while in the world of art a similar emphasis led to attempts by artists to imitate the objects they depicted so that the observer would see an image that resembled the original as closely as possible.<sup>4</sup> The importance of unmediated observation was manifested also in the flourishing of ethnographic writing about various nations, especially as a result of the new geographic discoveries and the encounter with new and foreign cultures.<sup>5</sup>

Early modern European authors who wrote about foreign peoples used the accounts of travelers and explorers who had reached what used to be *terra incognita*.<sup>6</sup> On the whole these descriptions were based on close observation of lands and peoples hitherto almost unknown, and in most cases they lacked the fictional tone that characterized many medieval descriptions. The new genre of ethnographic literature flourished side by side with the older thriving genre of travel literature and together they both enrich our understanding and knowledge of early modern perceptions of foreign cultures.<sup>7</sup>

Belonging to this new literary genre of ethnographic writings were also books about Muslims and Jews, and about eastern forms of Christianity such as the Coptic and Ethiopian churches. In many cases this was the first time Europeans had had access to information about the ways in which these groups performed their ceremonies. One ceremony common

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<sup>3</sup> Prominent examples of this are offered, e.g., by Conrad Gesner, *Historia animalium* (4 vols.; Zürich, 1551–1558); Pierre Belon, *L'histoire de la nature des oyseaux, avec leurs descriptions & naïfs portraits retirez du naturel* (Paris, 1555); Ulisse Aldrovandi, *De animalibus insectis libri septem, cum singulorum iconibus ad vivum expressis* (Bologna, 1602). On these works see Christa Riedl-Dorn, *Wissenschaft und Fabelwesen: Ein kritischer Versuch über Conrad Gessner und Ulisse Aldrovandi* (Vienna and Cologne, 1989); Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Los Angeles and London, 1994), esp. 57–70.

<sup>4</sup> Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, 26–171.

<sup>5</sup> Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*; Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters*.

<sup>6</sup> Although as Grafton, Shelford, and Siraisi have shown there is a tension in the ethnographic writing of the early modern period between the descriptions based on observation and the information to be found in traditional texts; see Anthony Grafton with April Shelford and Nancy Siraisi, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> The main difference between these two genres is in the organization of the material. While a travel narrative is organized mainly according to the chronological order in which the traveler visited the various places, in the ethnographic writings the material is organized thematically. For this distinction see Justin Stagl and Christopher Pinney, "Introduction," in idem, eds., *From Travel Literature to Ethnography = History and Anthropology* 9:2–4 (1996): 121–25. Nonetheless this distinction is not always so clear; some early modern travelers attempted a systematic account of the ethnographical data they encountered as well as a chronological account of their travels.

to Muslims, Jews, and Ethiopian Christians, considered by some early modern writers to be one of the oldest religious ceremonies, is circumcision, which will be the focus of this essay. As a ceremony shared by these three religious groups, the focus on the descriptions of circumcision will enable us to trace both the similarities and the differences in the attitudes of early modern writers to these religions and their ceremonies.

Accounts of circumcision appear in systematic works about Jews, Muslims, and Christian Ethiopians. These sources are supplemented by travelers' accounts. I will start with a brief analysis of the writings about the Jewish ceremony and compare these with descriptions of Muslim and Ethiopian circumcision. Based on these comparisons I will offer some conclusions and remarks concerning the literature about circumcision in the early modern period, especially in the sixteenth century.

Starting in 1504 with a short description by the French humanist François Tissard (d. 1508), and continuing all the way through the eighteenth century, there are more than thirty ethnographic books that mention the Jewish ceremony of circumcision.<sup>8</sup> While these descriptions vary in length and detail, there are, nonetheless, several features shared by most of them. Before making some general observations concerning descriptions of circumcision in the ethnographic literature about the Jews, let us turn to one description as an example.

This description is found in Anthonius Margaritha's book *Der Gantz Jüdisch Glaub* (*The Entire Jewish Faith*), published for the first time in 1530.<sup>9</sup> Margaritha (ca. 1500–ca. 1540), a Jew who had converted to Catholicism, reports that the night before circumcision is considered very dangerous for the baby. Because of the danger the Jews hang talismans and utter many charms in order to protect the newborn. Some people stay up during this night, sitting next to the mother to guard her and her baby, and in some places they pass the time by playing cards and drinking wine.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed account of Christian descriptions of circumcision see Yaacov Deutsch, *Judaism in Christian Eyes: Ethnographic Descriptions of Jews and Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Anthonius Margaritha, *Der gantz Jüdisch Glaub* (Augsburg, 1530), H3<sup>r</sup>–H4<sup>r</sup>. On Margaritha see Maria Diemling, "Christliche Ethnographien' über Juden und Judentum in der Frühen Neuzeit: Die Konvertiten Victor von Carben und Anthonius Margaritha und ihre Darstellung jüdischen Lebens und jüdischer Religion" (Ph.D. diss.; Vienna, 1999); eadem, "Anthonius Margaritha on the 'Whole Jewish Faith': A Sixteenth-Century Convert from Judaism and his Depiction of the Jewish Religion," in *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (ed. D. Bell and S. G. Burnett; Leiden, 2006), 303–33.

The description continues with details about the instruments used in the ceremony and the different participants in it. Then Margaritha describes the three different parts of the ceremony: The first part of the ceremony, he relates, is called *Milah*—circumcision—and during this part, the circumciser cuts the foreskin. Traditionally, the circumciser then pulls and cuts the rest of the foreskin; this part is called *Periah*. Finally comes the *Metzizah* (sucking) whereby blood is extracted from the circumcised member. After he dresses the wound the circumciser and the father recite some blessings, during one of which a name is given to the infant.<sup>10</sup> At the conclusion of the ceremony the father invites the crowd for a meal, where some other blessings are recited and the rabbi delivers a sermon.<sup>11</sup>

When he describes the sucking of the member, Margaritha writes that this practice hurts the baby, and that it is not prescribed in the Old Testament. Later, he also criticizes the pulling of the foreskin, because this custom does not appear in the Old Testament either. He says that the pulling of the foreskin hurts even more than the circumcision itself.<sup>12</sup> According to Margaritha, at the end of the ceremony the father makes a festive meal for his friends and the circumciser says a long blessing in which he expresses the hope that the Christians and other Gentiles will endure great suffering.<sup>13</sup>

Notwithstanding Margaritha's mistake regarding the order of the ceremony, his description of circumcision in general is accurate, and is verified by Jewish sources of the period. However, in this case, there are two additions. His claim that parts of the contemporary ritual do not appear in the Old Testament and his claim that the ceremony involves an anti-Christian element are not found in previous discussions of circumcision.

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<sup>10</sup> On the traditional ceremony and its different parts, see Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Rituals of Birth in Judaism," in *Life Cycles in Jewish and Christian Worship* (ed. P. F. Bradshaw and L. A. Hoffman; Notre Dame and London, 1996), 32–54.

<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that the order Margaritha gives is wrong, he mistakenly reports that the sucking of the member preceded the pulling of the remainder of the foreskin; the mistake probably reflects the fact that the description is based on memories that he had from the time when he was still a Jew. Later authors made the same mistake, a sure proof of their reliance on Margaritha's work.

<sup>12</sup> Margaritha, *Der gantz Jüdisch Glaub*, H2v: "Solliche Prio thut den kinden vil schmerzlicher wee dann die beschneydung selbs."

<sup>13</sup> Although today the circumcision ceremony does not include anti-Christian prayers, an examination of manuscripts of early modern prayer books shows that they did include such prayers. Thus one hymn that was part of the ceremony includes the lines: "and the Gentiles will be completely destroyed"; see MS Parma-Biblioteca Palatina 2895, 144 (no. 13788 in The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts; The National Library of Israel).

Following Margaritha, other reports in the ethnographic literature make similar claims, namely that the ceremony is a deviation from the biblical commandments and that it contains anti-Christian elements. In addition, and mainly from the seventeenth century onwards, several authors argue that the ceremony is full of superstitious elements. What should be noted here is that almost all the information in these descriptions is accurate and fits what we know from Jewish sources about the ceremony as it was performed at that time. The decision, however, as to which elements of the ceremony should be brought forward, as well as the criticism attached to it, reveal the polemical nature of these descriptions and make them part of what I have described elsewhere as “polemical ethnography.”<sup>14</sup>

As another religion that was given ethnographic descriptions during this period, Islam presents an interesting comparison to the descriptions of Judaism. Christian interest in Islam in its earliest days was surprisingly very limited. During the Middle Ages, especially as a result of the Crusades, there are some signs of a growing interest, and thus already in the twelfth century the Quran had been translated into Latin.<sup>15</sup>

The volume of writing about Islam increased dramatically toward the end of the fifteenth century, as the Ottomans became a mighty power and a threat to European and Christian hegemony. Thousands of essays and books on the Turks, the Ottoman Empire, and Islam at large were published during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>16</sup> Especially important in this regard was Luther's work on the Turks, which influenced

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<sup>14</sup> Yaacov Deutsch, “Polemical Ethnographies: Descriptions of *Yom Kippur* in the Writings of Christian Hebraists and Jewish Converts to Christianity in Early Modern Europe,” in *Hebraica Veritas? Jews and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (ed. A. P. Coudert and J. S. Shoulson; Philadelphia, 2004), 202–33.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom, 1140–1560* (Philadelphia, 2007). For a general overview see Johann Fück, *Die arabischen Studien in Europa* (Leipzig, 1955); Norman Daniel, “Learned and Popular Attitudes to the Arabs in the Middle Ages,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1 (1977): 41–52; Michael Frassetto and David R. Blanks (eds.), *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other* (New York, 1999); and more recently, Robert Irwin, *For the Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* (London, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> For a bibliography of early modern European writing on Turkey, see Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches: Grossentheils aus bisher unbenutzten Handschriften und Archiven* (Pest, 1835). For the sixteenth century, see Carl Göllner, *Turcica: Die europäischen Türkendrucke des 16. Jahrhunderts 1501–1550* (Bucharest and Berlin, 1961); idem, *Turcica: Die europäischen Türkendrucke des 16. Jahrhunderts 1551–1600* (Bucharest and Baden-Baden, 1968). A short overview of the interest in Islam in the early modern period is found in Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York and Oxford, 1993), 72–84. For English views on Islam see Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (Cambridge, 1998).

many later Lutheran authors.<sup>17</sup> However, most of these descriptions tend to focus on the history of the Ottomans, on their political system, or on geographical aspects of their country, and the place of religion was very limited.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, even when there are descriptions of Islam in its own right, they tend to focus on Muhammad and his history and less on the actual religious practice of Muslims. In addition, there are some instances where authors provide an account of the religious customs and ceremonies of the Muslims but do not mention circumcision at all. For example, in the *Tractatus de moribus, conditionibus et nequicia turcorum* by Georgius de Hungaria (1422/3–1502), first published in 1481 and one of the first and most popular works about Islam in the early modern period, there is an ethnographic account of the Turks but no reference to circumcision.<sup>19</sup> Johannes Adelphus (1485–1523), at the end of his book *Die Türckisch Chronica*, details some of the religious customs of the Muslims, such as the five daily prayers and the fasts, but does not mention circumcision.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in the fourth chapter of his *Dreyzehnen Predigen vom Türcken*, the Lutheran theologian Jacob Andreae (1528–1590) refers to several religious practices but does not discuss circumcision.<sup>21</sup> Consequently the number of descriptions of Muslim circumcision is very limited.

Hans Schiltberger (1381–ca. 1440) a German who was taken captive in Turkey in 1396 and stayed there until 1427, wrote in that same year about his experiences. Part of his work is dedicated to the Muslim religion; there

<sup>17</sup> Gregory J. Miller, "Luther on the Turks and Islam," *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (2000): 79–97.

<sup>18</sup> Alastair Hamilton, "The Study of Islam in Early Modern Europe," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 3 (2001): 169–82; Höfert, *Den Feind beschreiben*; Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Concerning the work, its author, and its various editions see Georgius de Hungaria, *Tractatus de Moribus, Conditionibus et Nequicia Turcorum* (1481): *Traktat über die Sitten, die Lebensverhältnisse und die Arglist der Türken* (ed. R. Klockow: Weimar, 1993), 11–60; Albrecht Classen, "The World of the Turks Described by an Eye-Witness: Georgius de Hungaria's Dialectical Discourse on the Foreign World of the Ottoman Empire," *Journal of Early Modern History* 7 (2003): 257–79.

<sup>20</sup> Johannes Adelphus, *Dje Türkisch Chronica: Von irem vrsprung anefang vnd regiment biß vff dise zeit sampt yrē kriegē vnd streyten mit den christen begangen Erbaemrklich zu lessen* (Strasbourg, 1513).

<sup>21</sup> Jacob Andreae, *Dreyzehnen Predigen vom Türcken: In wölchen gehandelt würdt von seines Regiments Ursprung, Glauben und Religion, Vom Türckischen Alcoran, unnd desselben grundtlicher Widerlegung durch sein selbs des Alcorans Zeugnissen, Von seinem Glück und Wolfart, warum̃ jme Got so lange zeit wider sein arme Christenheit zügesehen, Wie ihm zubegegnen, und wider ihne glücklich zustreiten, Unnd von seinem endtlichen Undergang* (Tübingen, 1568). On Andreae and his work see Susan Boettcher, "German Orientalism in the Age of Confessional Consolidation: Jacob Andreae's *Thirteen Sermons on the Turk*, 1568," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24 (2004): 101–15.



he mentions that, like the Jews, the Muslims circumcise their children, and they do this at the age of thirteen.<sup>22</sup> As we shall see, the brevity of this reference is not exceptional.

Another captive who wrote a description of the “Turkish religion” was the Genovese Giovanni Antonio Menavino (ca. 1491–ca. 1534), who was captured on board his father’s ship at the age of twelve and remained in captivity for ten years, until he managed to escape to Italy in 1513. As with Schiltberger’s report, the account in Menavino’s *I cinque libri della legge, religione et vita de’ Turchi*—again, one of the most popular books in the sixteenth century about the Turks and their religion—is very short; only two lines are devoted to circumcision.<sup>23</sup>

In 1530 the German humanist and reformer Sebastian Frank (1499–1543) translated Georgius de Hungaria’s *Tractatus de moribus* into German. This edition included additions to the original text. One of them is a brief reference to circumcision. According to Frank, the Turks observe circumcision like the Saracens. He also adds that unlike the Jews, they are not so strict about circumcision because their children might die before they are circumcised.<sup>24</sup>

A slightly longer reference to circumcision is found in Johannes Cuspinianus’s (1473–1529) work, *De Turcorum origine*, which was published posthumously in 1541.<sup>25</sup> Cuspinianus, a humanist and physician, served as the rector of the University of Vienna and never left Europe. Therefore his writing is based on existing works and probably also oral information. According to Cuspinianus the Turks do not practice circumcision as a remedy for guilt of the original sin, as is the case with the Jews, but rather as a superstition. It is not clear what the source for his explanation about Jewish circumcision is, but it seems that for him there is a difference between observing this custom due to religious motivations

<sup>22</sup> Hans Schiltbergers *Reisebuch nach der Nürnberger Handschrift* (ed. V. Langmantel; Tübingen, 1885), 86.

<sup>23</sup> Giovanni Antonio Menavino, *I Cinque libri della legge, religione, et vita de’ Turchi et della corte, & d’alcune guerre del Gran Turco* (Venice, 1548), 82.

<sup>24</sup> Georgius de Hungaria, *Cronica: Abconterfayung und entwerffung der Türckey mit yrem begryff, Inhalt Provintzen, Völckern... Neulich widerumb uberlesen corrigiert und gebessert, von einem Sybenburger... in Latein beschryben, durch Sebastian Franck verteutscht* (Augsburg, 1530), H4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Johannes Cuspinianus, *De Turcorum origine, religione, ac immanissima eorum in Christianos tyrannide, deq[ue] viis per quas Christiani principes Turcos profligare & inuadere facile possent Liber iamprimum natus et ad vtilitatem rei publicae Christianae ditus* (Antwerp, 1541).

(however wrongheaded) and practices that result from ignorance and superstition.

The first detailed account of circumcision is found in Bartholomäus Georgijevic (ca. 1510–ca. 1566), *De Turcarum ritu et caeremoniis*,<sup>26</sup> probably the most popular book about Islam in the second half of the sixteenth century; almost two pages deal with the ceremony.<sup>27</sup> Georgijevic, a Catholic of Hungarian or Croatian origin, was captured by the Turks in the battle of Mohács (August, 1526) and served as a slave in Istanbul and other places for almost a decade.<sup>28</sup> He starts his description with a reference to the Jewish ceremony, and states that rather than circumcising children on the eighth day, the Muslims circumcise their children when they are seven or eight years old. He explains that the reason for this is that the child has to confess his belief before he is circumcised. Georgijevic tells us that he witnessed circumcision ceremonies on many occasions, and describes in detail the celebration and the meal before the ceremony takes place. He then turns to the ceremony itself and describes how the doctor who is to perform the circumcision first comes and checks the child, and tells him that he will come back the next day. The doctor then returns, pretending that he forgot to check something; he performs the circumcision immediately, and thus the child does not have time to fear the procedure. According to Georgijevic, only after the ceremony is the boy called a Muslim, which means circumcised (it is noteworthy that this explanation is wrong); only then does he become a member of the community. Altogether, Georgijevic deals with various aspects of the ceremony, but he does not focus at all on the details of the procedure itself. The entire section about circumcision is very descriptive and, significantly, non-polemical.

Other publications from the first half of the sixteenth century contain similar descriptions. Thus, for example, Antoine Geuffroy writes in 1542 that instead of baptism, the Turks circumcise their children like the Jews, but that they do not hold circumcision to be as important as the latter do, since sometimes they circumcise the children when they are five or ten or even older, and it may happen that children die before they are

<sup>26</sup> Bartholomäus Georgijevic, *De Turcarum ritu et caeremoniis* (Antwerp, 1544).

<sup>27</sup> On this book see Nurdan M. Aksulu, *Bartholomäus Georgievičs Türkenschrift, "De Turcarum ritu et caeremoniis" (1544), und ihre beiden deutschen Übersetzungen von 1545: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Türkenbildes in Europa* (Stuttgart, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Franz Kidrič, "Bartholomaeus Gjorgjevič: Biographische und bibliographische Zusammenfassung," *Museion: Veröffentlichungen aus der Nationalbibliothek in Wien* 2 (1920): 10–11.

circumcised.<sup>29</sup> By mentioning baptism alongside Jewish circumcision, Geuffroy hints at the similar function of both as initiation rites. For Geuffroy, performing circumcision when the child is five or ten years old is a sign of a lower level of observance; although he does not discuss the time factor explicitly, it is likely that he has in mind a comparison of the “belated” Muslim ceremony with Jewish circumcision on the eighth day and the Christian baptism of young babies. Nonetheless, he does not try to understand the reason for this “delay,” nor does he mention the Muslim explanation for circumcision at a later age; i.e., that the child should undergo the ceremony of his own volition, an explanation that will appear in the writings of later authors.<sup>30</sup>

Accounts from the second half of the sixteenth century repeat, and in many cases copy almost verbatim, sections from earlier descriptions.<sup>31</sup> One element, however, that prevails during this period is the place given to the descriptions of the festivities surrounding the ceremony. Already in 1553 Pierre Belon (1517–1564), a French Catholic, mentions some aspects of the celebration—such as the procession to the house of the boy, his special clothing, and the music played during the ceremony—and compares it to wedding ceremonies in France.<sup>32</sup> A few years later Johann Helffrich, a Protestant who went on a pilgrimage from Germany to the Holy Land in 1565, wrote an account of the circumcision ceremony he had seen in

<sup>29</sup> Antoine Geuffroy, *Estat de la court du Grant Turc, l'orde de sa gendarmerie, & de ses finances avec un brief discours de leurs conquestes depuis le premier de ceste race* (Paris, 1542). This work was first printed in French in 1542 and translated during the same year into English. I could not find any information about the author besides some sources that mention that he was a Knight Hospitaller. Höfert, who discusses Geuffroy's work, does not provide any biographical information but argues that considerable portions of the book are taken from Benedetto Ramberti, *Libri tre delle cose de' Turchi* (Venice, 1539). Therefore she suggests that Geuffroy did not travel to the East but borrowed from other writers. See Höfert, *Den Feind beschreiben*, 209–11. Nonetheless, Ramberti does not mention circumcision and therefore could not be Geuffroy's source on this matter. Moreover, I could not find any other report about circumcision similar to his.

<sup>30</sup> Franciscus Traugott, *Neu eröffnete Türcken Schule: Worinnen deroselben Gotteslästerliche, verdammliche und also recht Teuffliche Lehre, Leben, Sitten und Wandel. Allen frommen Christen bey Erinnerung jetziger grausam-wütenden Türckischen Kriges-Macht zum Abscheu, ernstlicher Auffmunterung und standhaffter Verfolgung aus selbs eigener zehnjähriger Wahrnehmung, kurtz jedoch ausführlich beschrieben* (Leipzig, 1684).

<sup>31</sup> For example the French naturalist Pierre Belon, who traveled to the East and wrote a detailed report about his itinerary (first published in 1553), repeats almost verbatim Georgijevic's description of the way the circumciser tricks the child; see Pierre Belon, *Voyage au Levant: Les observations de Pierre Belon du Mans de plusieurs singularites & choses memorables trouuees en Grece, Turquie, Judee, Egypte, Arabie & autres pays etranges*, 1553 (ed. A. Merle; Paris, 2001), 490–91.

<sup>32</sup> Belon, *Voyage au Levant*, 491.

Cairo.<sup>33</sup> He describes in great detail the procession from the house of the circumcised boy to the mosque, and the fanciness and extravagance of the ceremony. Helffrich mentions that women and the boys who were about to be circumcised rode small donkeys, and that during the ceremony the boy was laid on a golden chair; he reports that in some cases, the procession and the ceremony lasted a full day.

A widely reported celebration took place in 1582, when Sultan Murad III (r. 1574–1595) celebrated the circumcision of his son Prince Mehmed in what one historian describes as “the longest and probably the most expensive and grandiose festival the Ottomans ever had.”<sup>34</sup> Reports about the festivities, which lasted fifty days, were recorded both by locals and by Europeans attending the celebrations.<sup>35</sup> Not surprisingly, the circumcision itself did not play a major role in these descriptions and in the two reports I managed to find, it was not mentioned at all.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, if we go back to the other descriptions discussed thus far we can see that they, too, lack almost any reference to the details of the circumcision itself, namely, to what exactly was being done in the ceremony, and how it was done.

One interesting point regarding the descriptions of Muslim circumcision is that in almost all of them, and this has been the case in all the examples I have brought so far, the Muslim circumcision is compared to the Jewish ceremony. On the other hand, and not surprisingly, in the description of the Jewish ceremony there is no reference to the Muslim ceremony. I will return to this observation in the conclusion.

In addition to Muslims and Jews, circumcision was also practiced by the Christians of Ethiopia.<sup>37</sup> Several early modern travelers report upon this

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<sup>33</sup> Johannes Helffrich, *Kurtzer und Warhafftiger Bericht, Von der Reis aus Venedig nach Hierusalem, Von dannen inn Aegypten, auff den Berg Sinai, und folgendes widerumb gen Venedig* (Leipzig, 1578), Fr<sup>r</sup>. On Helffrich see Thomas F. Noona, *The Road to Jerusalem: Pilgrimage and Travel in the Age of Discovery* (Philadelphia, 2007), 162.

<sup>34</sup> Derin Terzioğlu, “The Imperial Circumcision Festival of 1582: An Interpretation,” *Muqarnas* 12 (1995): 84.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 85, and the references there.

<sup>36</sup> Anonymous, *Particular Beschreibung der Ordnung und Herrlichkeit, so in dem Fest der Beschneidung des Sultan Machmet yetzigen Türckischen Kayzers Sultan Amuraths Son, zu Constantinopel im 1582 Jar ist gehalten, den andern Junii angefangen, und den 26 Julii vollendt warden* (Augsburg, 1582); Anonymous, *Türckische Beschneidung: Warhafte kurtze beschreibung, wie Amurath der jetzt regierende Türckische Keiser, seinem Son Mahometen, so er von Circassa, einer Nationalerin, seinem Keksweib erzeuget, und nu mehr bei fünffzehnen Jares, mit grossen Pomp und Herrligkeit, zu Constantinopel beschneiden lassen* (Nürnberg, 1582).

<sup>37</sup> It was also practiced by members of the Coptic Church, but was not regarded as important there as it was in the Ethiopian Church; therefore I will limit the discussion only

ceremony among the Ethiopians and their accounts can shed light on another aspect of Christian attitudes toward circumcision. The case of circumcision among the Ethiopians is unique, since the Ethiopians themselves were Christians. Already in the Middle Ages European travelers had taken special notice of the Ethiopians' observance of circumcision.<sup>38</sup> In a letter written in 1216–17, Jacques de Vitry, bishop of Acre (1216–1228) describes his journey in the Holy Land. He writes that in Acre there are Ethiopians who “in the manner of Jews were circumcising their children.”<sup>39</sup> He also writes that after he gave a sermon on the subject and explained to the Ethiopians that they would not profit from observing circumcision, they promised him that in the future they would not perform the ritual. Toward the end of the fifteenth century Brocchi da Imola, an Italian merchant who visited the court of Eskender, ruler of Ethiopia (1478–1494), wrote in 1482 that the Ethiopians justify the practice of circumcision as a tradition and as a reminder of what Christ himself and his disciples did.<sup>40</sup>

Another account of Ethiopian circumcision can be found in the writings of Francisco Álvarez, who was a member of the Portuguese embassy to Ethiopia in 1520 and stayed there for six years. Excerpts from his account of his visit to Ethiopia were published after he returned to Lisbon, and they include his report about circumcision among the Ethiopians.<sup>41</sup> According to Álvarez:

Circumcision is done by anybody without any ceremony, only they say that so they find it written in the books, that God commanded circumcision. And let not the reader of this be amazed—they also circumcise the females as well as the males, which was not in the Old Law.<sup>42</sup>

According to this passage the Ethiopians performed circumcision because God commanded it in the Bible. Álvarez, however, thought it important

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to the latter. For a brief reference to the missionaries' attitudes towards Coptic circumcision, see Alastair Hamilton, *The Copts and the West, 1439–1822: The European Discovery of the Egyptian Church* (Oxford, 2006), 42.

<sup>38</sup> Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, “Paul and the Other: The Portuguese Debate on the Circumcision of the Ethiopians,” in *Ethiopia and the Missions: Historical and Anthropological Insights* (ed. V. Böll, S. Kaplan, A. Martínez d'Alòs-Moner and E. Sokolinskaia; Münster, 2005), 332–33. I would like to thank Leonardo Cohen Shabot for this and other references and for his advice on this matter.

<sup>39</sup> “Qui more Judeorum parvulos circumcidebant,” in Enrico Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina* (Rome, 1943), 55–56.

<sup>40</sup> See d'Alòs-Moner, “Paul and the Other,” 33.

<sup>41</sup> *Verdadeira Informação das Terras do Preste João das Índias* (Lisbon, 1540).

<sup>42</sup> Francisco Álvarez, *Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Abyssinia during the Years 1520–1527* (trans. from the Portuguese and ed. with notes and an introduction by Lord Stanley of Alderley; London, 1881), 48.

to emphasize that circumcision was performed without any ceremony, namely without liturgy or instructions how to perform the act, and he proves this by underlining the fact that anybody can perform the act of circumcision. On the basis of later references to circumcision among the Ethiopians, it is tempting to suggest that when Álvarez writes that they perform circumcision without a ceremony, he is arguing that, for the Ethiopians, circumcision is no longer a religious ceremony—or at least that the religious element, which originated in the attribution of this practice to God's commandment, is no longer important.

In 1520, the Portuguese and the Ethiopians exchanged embassies, and the involvement of Portugal's Catholic Church in Ethiopia's religious matters grew rapidly. In 1527, the monk Saga Za Ab was interrogated in the Portuguese court, in what was *de facto* an inquisitional process.<sup>43</sup> The main accusation against Za Ab was that the Ethiopians were "Judaei et Mahometani," and not Christians. As d'Alòs-Moner argues, there were two major reasons for the harsh attack on the Ethiopian Church. The first was the schism in the Christian world that had led to religious intolerance, and the second was the "anti-oriental" impulse in the Iberian Peninsula that was manifested in the expulsions of Muslims and Jews. Ideas about a homogenous society, a single faith and a single race, rooted in the concept of purity of blood, were spreading, and these paved the way to the rejection of the oriental heritage. Ethiopia as part of this oriental tradition was imagined as the antagonist of Christian Europe.<sup>44</sup>

Later on, when the Jesuit missionaries arrived in Ethiopia, they continued attacks on the observance of the Sabbath, the avoidance of eating pork, and especially the practice of circumcision. For the missionaries, circumcision was part of the Judaic heritage, and they insisted that the Ethiopians should not continue to observe it, even if the reasons for its observance had to do with *imitatio Christi*.<sup>45</sup> This hostile attitude of the Jesuits was markedly different from that of the early travelers I discussed above, who mentioned the Jewish origin of circumcision, but did not feel the need to have it abolished.

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<sup>43</sup> d'Alòs-Moner, "Paul and the Other," 34–35.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 35–36.

<sup>45</sup> "Circumcisio qua nunc utuntur Aethiopes, Abyssini, non licet etiamsi fiat ad imitandum Christum"; the quotation is taken from d'Alòs-Moner, "Paul and the Other," 42 n. 37; see also Leonardo Cohen, *The Missionary Strategies of the Jesuits in Ethiopia (1555–1632)* (Wiesbaden, 2009), 180–86.

Interestingly, when the Jesuits met with the Oromo, a non-Christian group in Ethiopia that also practiced circumcision, they differentiated between Christian circumcision and pagan circumcision and did not ask the Oromo to stop their practice. Leonardo Cohen has argued that in Pauline theology the rejection of corporeal circumcision was a defining element and therefore there was no place for a theological accommodation of Christian circumcision, a tactic commonly adopted by the Jesuits in encountering foreign cultures. However, according to Cohen, in the case of the Oromo the practice of circumcision was a result of their contacts with others who practiced circumcision, but they were not aware of the true meaning of it and did not practice it as a religious ceremony.<sup>46</sup>

The Ethiopian response to Jesuit accusations is important because it reveals some of the possibilities and ideas that circulated regarding Jewish circumcision and also clarifies the Jesuit discourse on this issue. The most famous response to the Jesuit claims is found in the *Confessio Fidei* (1556) of King Gälawdewos (r. 1540–1559) where he explains:

And as to the institution of circumcision, it is not that we are circumcised like the Jews, for we know the word of the teaching of Paul, fount of wisdom, which says (Gal 5:6) that circumcision is of no avail, and lack of circumcision does not empower either. . . . But the circumcision which we have is according to the custom of the country—like the scarification of the face [practiced] in Ethiopia and Nubia; and like the perforation of the ears among Indians. What we do is not for the observance of the laws of the Pentateuch but rather in accord with the custom of the people.<sup>47</sup>

The main point of his explanation is that circumcision is not a religious ceremony but rather a cultural custom. This explanation resembles that of Álvarez, who tried to clarify why the Ethiopians practice circumcision. It is likely that King Gälawdewos was trying to minimize the criticism of the Jesuits by distinguishing between Ethiopian and Jewish circumcision, but the continuation of the Jesuit attacks on the rite reveals that his explanation was not well received.

In sum, by comparing descriptions of Jewish, Muslim, and Ethiopian Christian circumcision, one can see that for early modern European authors circumcision was in essence a Jewish ceremony, and that in many ways,

<sup>46</sup> Leonardo Cohen Shabot, "Los portugueses en Etiopía y la problemática de los ritos 'judaicos'," *Historia y grafía* 17 (2001): 237–40.

<sup>47</sup> Translated in Edward Ullendorff, "The *Confessio Fidei* of King Claudius of Ethiopia," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32 (1987): 173–74.



this understanding shaped their attitude to the ceremony. In keeping with Pauline theology, circumcision in all three contexts was seen as an outward sign. According to Paul: "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter" (Rom 2:28–29). The Jewish insistence that circumcision is an essential, outward sign explains why the Jewish ceremony was attacked.

In the case of Muslims and Christian Ethiopians, the issue was more complicated. On the one hand, the mere observation of the rite should have been a good enough reason to condemn it as an outward religious sign. On the other hand, the argument was that if it was not intended to be a religious sign, it was meaningless and therefore it did not matter whether one observed it or not. As mentioned above, much like the descriptions of Ethiopian practice, almost all the descriptions of the Muslim ceremony mention the similarity to the Jewish ceremony, along with the difference in age of the person circumcised; this point of difference constitutes the proof that for the Muslims circumcision is not a genuine religious obligation. This evaluation likewise seems to indicate that, if circumcision is not a religious ceremony, then its observance does not really matter; as we saw in the descriptions of Muslim circumcision, apart from one author who calls the Muslim custom a superstition, there was no attack on the custom itself.

Early modern European writing about circumcision reveals that the same ceremony could be described in several ways and that the descriptions depend on the purpose of the author. In each of the three cases reviewed here circumcision was viewed differently. However one aspect common to all these descriptions is that they are all part of an attempt to construct distinctions between European Christians and those who were not. In the case of the Jews, the various attacks on circumcision were confirmations of Jewish deviation from the biblical law, Jewish hatred of Christianity, and Jewish superstitions; thus the ceremony defines Jewish otherness. In the case of the Ethiopians, their observation of circumcision shows that they do not understand the true (Pauline) meaning of this precept. In the case of the Muslims, the mere reference to circumcision as a Jewish custom, even if the Muslims did not observe it like the Jews, is enough to establish Muslim otherness. Nonetheless it is important to see that contrary to descriptions of other aspects of Muslim life, which are used to launch attacks on Muslims, the descriptions of circumcision and in many cases the descriptions of Islam as a religion are very neutral.



These different approaches toward the Jewish and the Ethiopic rite on the one hand and the Muslim on the other reflect some of the diversities regarding the interest of Christians in Jewish and Muslim ceremonies.<sup>48</sup> For Christians who wrote about Judaism, it was always the rejected religion, and their main concern was to demonstrate that the Jewish customs and ceremonies themselves exemplified why the Jewish religion should be rejected. For Christians who wrote about Islam, the case was different. For them Islam was not a religion that one had to disparage or critique in order to prove the superiority of Christianity. This is one of the reasons why writing on Islam as religion was relatively limited, and it also explains why the description of Muslim religion was more neutral. This is not to say that other descriptions of Muslims and especially of Turks do not include pejorative judgments and severe criticism. However, it seems that this criticism is less present in the discussions of Muslim ceremonies and rituals, especially when these discussions are compared to the discussions of Jewish ritual from the same period.

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<sup>48</sup> For our purpose here the Ethiopian custom is considered to be like a Jewish rite, since this is the way it was perceived by Christian authors.



## ISLAM, EASTERN CHRISTIANITY, AND SUPERSTITION ACCORDING TO SOME EARLY MODERN ENGLISH OBSERVERS\*

Zur Shalev

In the wake of the Catholic and Protestant Reformations in early modern Europe, the notion of the superstitious came to acquire a central place in the discourse of churchmen and scholars, who grappled with the definition and application of this sensitive term. Used at the time mostly pejoratively and in reference to the beliefs and practices of other religious groups, superstition was a complex term that held different meanings in different contexts. Recent historians of early modern religion tend to emphasize this inherent instability of the term, which defies clear-cut distinctions between Catholics and Protestants, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, town and country, official elite and popular, or religion and magic. Studies employing this open-minded and fruitful approach have so far, however, largely concentrated on the religious landscape of Europe itself.<sup>1</sup> The question of superstition as the term was applied to the religions of the Levant in early modern discourse is open to further detailed investigation.

That the Orient in general and Islam in particular were a rich source of both heresy and superstition was not a new notion in the early modern period. In the opening of his early-twelfth-century chronicle of the First Crusade, the *Dei gesta per Francos*, Guibert de Nogent (ca. 1055–1124)

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\* I am delighted to offer a paper to a volume celebrating the scholarship of Michael Heyd, whose influence on my intellectual trajectory has been immense. In Michael's inspiring lectures and seminars the early modern period became pleasantly familiar, fascinatingly alien, and always irresistibly attractive. I am particularly pleased to present here a theme about which I began to think in the framework of Michael's seminar on toleration, more than a decade ago.

<sup>1</sup> See Helen L. Parish and William G. Naphy (eds.), *Religion and Superstition in Reformation Europe* (Manchester, 2002), editors' introduction, 1–22; David Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch: The System of the Sacred in Early Modern Terra d'Otranto* (Manchester, 1992); Alexandra Walsham, "Holywell: Contesting Sacred Space in Post-Reformation Wales," in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe* (ed. W. Coster and A. Spicer; Cambridge, 2005), 211–36; and recently, Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion 1250–1750* (New York, 2010). On superstition in non-European contexts see Sabine MacCormack, *Religion in the Andes: Vision and Imagination in Early Colonial Peru* (Princeton, 1991); Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Theology, Ethnography, and the Historicization of Idolatry," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67:4 (2006): 571–96; David A. Pailin, *Attitudes to Other Religions: Comparative Religion in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester, 1984).

provided what would become a familiar account of Oriental religious deviance. According to Guibert, while the churches founded by “the faithful Helen” long endured, nevertheless:

the faith of Easterners, which has never been stable, but has always been variable and unsteady, searching for novelty, always exceeding the bounds of true belief, finally deserted the authority of the early fathers. Apparently, these men, because of the purity of the air and the sky in which they are born, as result of which their bodies are lighter and their intellect consequently more agile, customarily abuse the brilliance of their intelligence with many useless commentaries. . . . Out of this came heresies and ominous kinds of different plagues. Such a baneful and inextricable labyrinth of these illnesses existed that the most desolate land anywhere could not offer worse vipers and nettles.<sup>2</sup>

For Guibert, following the disintegration of the old Roman world, the climate of the East allowed overly quick Eastern minds to run wild. Islam, according to Guibert, was in fact the result of a complex plot by an ambitious Christian monk, who had used Muhammad to gain power and influence. Guibert was not alone in attributing heresy, idolatry, and superstition to the East and especially to Islam.<sup>3</sup> This tradition of polemic persisted well into the early modern period and was quite unaffected by the genuine scholarly knowledge that European orientalists accumulated, especially during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> Thus members of the European religious, political, and intellectual elites who visited the Levant and left written accounts of their journeys were addressing an audience who surely shared with them a good dose of entrenched

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<sup>2</sup> Guibert de Nogent, *The Deeds of God through the Franks: A Translation of Guibert de Nogent's Gesta dei per Francos* (ed. and trans. R. Levine; Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1997), Book 1:30. Original text: “Orientalium autem fides cum semper nutabunda constiterit et rerum molitione novarum mutabilis et vagabunda fuerit, semper a regula verae credulitatis exorbitans, ab antiquorum Patrum auctoritate descivit. Ipsi plane homines pro aeris et celi cui innati sunt puritate cum sint levioris corpulentiae et idcirco alacrioris ingenii, multis et inutilibus commentis solent radio suae perspicuitatis abuti et, dum maiorum sive coeavorum suorum discipiunt obtemperare magisterio, scrutati sunt iniquitates, defecerunt scrutantes scrutatio: inde hereses et pestium variarum genera portentuosae, quarum tanta pernitias et inextricabilis extitit laberintus, ut veprium vel etiam urticarum feracior uspiam fieri nequaquam incultissima possit humus.” In idem, *Dei gesta per Francos* (ed. R. B. C. Huygens; Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio mediaevalis 127A; Turnhout, 1996), 89–90.

<sup>3</sup> See John V. Tolan (ed.), *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays* (New York, 1996), xi–xxi.

<sup>4</sup> G. A. Russell (ed.), *The ‘Arabick’ Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth Century England* (Leiden, 1994); Gerald J. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford, 1996); Nicholas Dew, *Orientalism in Louis XIV’s France* (Oxford, 2009).

prejudice against the culture and religion of the Orient. From at least the Middle Ages, then, the Orient has frequently been constructed as a location of irrationality and wonder, of deeply embedded superstition and mystique.<sup>5</sup>

"The Arabians and Moors use much witchcraft at Cairo," reported the English astronomer and orientalist John Greaves (1602–1652) in his journal, composed during his visit to Egypt in 1638–1639.<sup>6</sup> As members of a post-Edward Said scholarly generation who have become acutely aware of the role of the Orient in the European imagination, today we are of course hardly surprised by the almost casual tone of this remark by a highly learned European traveler observing an Oriental city and its population. However, the notion of Eastern superstition emerges as less evident when examined from within particular and local contexts of utterance. Accordingly, if we follow the rest of John Greaves's report, the story becomes more complicated.

Like many Europeans who visited Cairo in the middle of the seventeenth century, Greaves stayed at the residence of the Consul, Santo Seghezzi, who served and represented the whole European community.<sup>7</sup> Greaves's remark was made in reference to one particular occasion when Santo Seghezzi, feeling ill, believed he was bewitched. Seghezzi therefore invited some professional witches—"Arabians and Moors"—to treat him. He subjected one to several tests, examining his prognostication skills and magical talents. Having caused a cat to speak, among other authenticating performances, the man was finally able to acquire the consul's trust. This local witch advised placing charms in the consul's hat and recommended several other precautionary, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, measures. The story did not end before the devil himself had appeared to the consul's sons "in the form of a Blackamoor," and had been chased away by means of valuable relics.

Greaves's account may indeed attest to a local "Eastern" Cairene culture rife with witchcraft and magic. However, this was not an exclusively

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Parker (ed.), *Early Modern Tales of Orient: A Critical Anthology* (London, 1999); Gerald L. MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800* (New York, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Savile 49(4), f. 42; published in Thomas Birch (ed.), *Miscellaneous Works of Mr. John Greaves* (2 vols.; London, 1737), 2:521–22.

<sup>7</sup> For European life in Cairo see Sydney H. Aufrère, *La momie et la tempête: Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc et la curiosité égyptienne en Provence au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Avignon, 1990).

Oriental or Egyptian preoccupation. The story portrays the European residents in town, Greaves included, as active consumers of and participants in this local industry of magic and charms. Another related example comes from the account of Gilles Fernel, who had traveled to the Levant in 1630 with a few associates. As much as they tried, Fernel reported, they could not convince the superstitious sailors—most likely of varying national origins, and yet sharing deep fears of storms and other misfortunes—to bring a mummy aboard the ship.<sup>8</sup> Evidently, these are not simply Oriental tales, or tales about the Orient per se. Rather, they point to the complexity of the early modern European encounter with manifestations of magic, superstition, and religious phenomena in the Levant.

In this brief essay I will discuss a few notable examples—relating mainly to seventeenth-century England—of the European engagement with the superstitious in the Levant. I am interested in particular in the different ways in which Europeans have used the terms “superstition” and “superstitious” in order to come to terms with various religious practices in that area. Although the present essay only offers a rough sketch, I would like to propose that European observations concerning superstitious religious phenomena in the Ottoman sphere together form a rich spectrum of diverse responses rather than a univocal reaction. These responses to religion as practiced in the area, whether popular or official, and by Christians and Muslims alike, are best and most fully understood when placed in their immediate circumstances and domestic contexts. In the period under discussion, roughly 1550–1700, Europe had seen some very dramatic religious developments and prolonged sequences of unrest. Europeans writing and reading about Oriental superstition were deeply troubled by, and engaged with, superstitions, magic, and heresies on their own turf. Frequently, then, and as Michael Heyd persuasively and eloquently argued in his study of European reactions to the Sabbatai Zevi affair, the most relevant context for understanding these observations

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<sup>8</sup> Gilles Fernel, et al., *Le voyage d'Italie et du Levant* (Rouen, 1670), 433: “Nous eussions volontiers enlevé un de ces corps pour envoyé en la Chrestienté, ce que les Arabes premettent moyennant quelque peu d'argent, mais la plupart des Mariniers sont si superstitieux, qu'ils ne voudroient pour rien du monde embarquer ces momies, croyant que cela leur causeroit des tempestes & des infortunes. . . .” See also Stephen Quirke, “Modern Mummies and Ancient Scarabs: The Egyptian Collection of Sir William Hamilton,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 9 (1997): 253–62.

would be, in fact, the state of religion in Europe itself.<sup>9</sup> Thus any description of superstition in the Levant was invariably participating in a shifting domestic European discourse on this subject.

As recent historiography on the Ottoman Empire and the Mediterranean has emphasized, the religious landscape in the area was remarkably hybrid and flexible.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, religious identities could and did change, whether in the context of captivity or in that of commercial interest. Europeans visiting the early modern Ottoman sphere, especially the urban centers of the Empire, were particularly struck by an embedded ethnic and religious diversity, which allowed multiple communities to cohabit the same space under de facto religious tolerance. On the whole, the situation in Europe was dramatically different, even if on the level of everyday life there were similar phenomena in some locations.<sup>11</sup> Most unusual to Europeans were cases of shared ritual and religious practice. It is here, at this communal meeting point, that they often located the superstitious.

One of the most well-known and influential European writers on the Ottoman Empire in the late sixteenth century was Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (1522–1592), who between 1554 and 1562 served as the Habsburg ambassador in Istanbul.<sup>12</sup> His well-polished pseudo-letters from the Ottoman Empire (written long after his return), with their mélange of antiquarian, natural-historical and political observations, have long captivated European audiences. In one of his letters Busbecq noted that, while the Turks avoided foreign technologies such as the printing press and clocks, so as not to diminish the authority of the Holy Scripture and the muezzin, respectively, nevertheless in “other matters they pay great respect to the time-honored customs of foreign nations, even to the detriment of their own religious scruples.” In this letter Busbecq went on to describe the Greek ceremony of the blessing of the sea, performed in the spring in order to ensure the sailors’ safety in the new sailing season. Even Turkish

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Heyd, “The ‘Jewish Quaker’: Christian Perceptions of Sabbatai Zevi as an Enthusiast,” in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (ed. A. P. Coudert and J. S. Shoulson; Philadelphia, 2004), 234–65.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2002); Molly Greene, *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton, 2000); Eric Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Scott C. Dixon, Dagmar Freist, and Mark Greengrass (eds.), *Living with Religious Diversity in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Amanda Wunder, “Western Travelers, Eastern Antiquities, and the Image of the Turk in Early Modern Europe,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 7 (2003): 89–119.

sailors, he observed, would not set sail before the performance of this ritual by the Greek priest.<sup>13</sup> Some Turks, Busbecq said, went so far as to secretly baptize their sons, believing in the efficacy of the ceremony. Busbecq is clear, however, that such behavior and such instances of shared ritual are “only true of the lower classes.”<sup>14</sup>

Close to a century later, the learned English chaplain, Thomas Smith (1638–1710), who was in Constantinople between 1668 and 1671, echoed Busbecq’s observations:

[the Greeks] have the same fearfull apprehensions of an evil Spirit, . . . which they pretend to be let loose the twelve days of the Christmas-Solemnity, and possess Children born within that space: during which time also the little boys and Girls dare not go abroad in the nighttime, for fear of meeting this Hobgoblin, but hasten home before Sun-set. The Turks seem to be infected with the like Superstition; for they will fear [to] venture to Sea till after the waters are blest by the Christians, that is, till after the Twelfth day . . . grosly imagining, that in their voyage they shall be met and sunk by a brazen Ship.<sup>15</sup>

At a popular level, Busbecq and Smith seem to imply, the Christians and the Muslims of the East are equally and jointly superstitious.

Busbecq reports another ceremony, in Lemnos, that was performed on the 6th of August, on the Feast of the Transfiguration. A Greek priest would open a cave and extract the Lemnian earth, called “Goat’s seal.” This earth was considered to have great healing powers, and was mixed with goat’s blood and formed into cakes. The Turks took a passive part in the ceremony, as spectators. They allegedly explained to Busbecq—and we cannot really know whether this conversation ever happened—that

many customs have survived from antiquity the utility of which has been proved by long experience, though they do not know the reason; the ancients, they say, knew and could see more than they can, and customs which they approved, ought not to be wantonly disturbed. They prefer, they say, to preserve them rather than make any change which may be for the worse.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Edward S. Forster (ed. and trans.), *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq. 1554–1562* (Oxford, 1968), 135–36.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 136–37.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Smith, *An Account of the Greek Church as to Its Doctrine and Rites of Worship with Several Historicall Remarks Interspersed Relating Thereunto: To Which Is Added an Account of the State of the Greek Church under Cyrillus Lucaris, Patriarch of Constantinople, with a Relation of His Sufferings and Death* (London, 1680), 186–87.

<sup>16</sup> *The Turkish Letters*, 136.



The antiquity Busbecq alludes to, put in the mouth of Turks, is pagan; the ceremony is attested to by Pliny, Galen, and others.<sup>17</sup> This must have been particularly intriguing to a person with highly developed antiquarian sensibilities such as our ambassador.

In general, the descriptions of both Busbecq and Smith disclose, not surprisingly, their shared, class-determined aversion toward popular superstitions. Undoubtedly, in their minds, the mixture of religious cultures around spurious rituals is unwarranted in true religion. And yet the pattern of shared devotion that each observes brings both men to pause and ponder the nature of religion in the Levant.

Another prominent observer of the religious map of the Levant was Sir Paul Rycaut (1629–1700). Soon after the Restoration, Rycaut became secretary to Heneage Finch, third Earl of Winchelsea, who had just been appointed ambassador to Istanbul. Rycaut quickly got involved with diplomatic and trading activities at all levels, acquiring the friendship of some eminent locals. In September 1667 Rycaut left Istanbul for Izmir, as the newly appointed English consul in that central hub of European trade with the Ottoman Empire. Placed in charge over the affairs of the Levant Company and the large merchant community, Rycaut spent the following decade there. In addition to his official duties in the Levant, Rycaut engaged in the writing of political reports. His first full-length book, which was also his most influential, was *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1667). Henry Oldenburg's interest in the work won Rycaut a fellowship from the young Royal Society. A few years later Rycaut published, under John Evelyn's name, an account of the Sabbatai Zevi affair, which had reached its climax in 1666.<sup>18</sup> Upon his return to England in 1679 he published, among other works, *The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches* which, while not particularly successful in its time, is nevertheless a valuable source for our present concerns.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See Frederick W. Hasluck, "Terra Lemnia," *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 16 (1909): 220–31. See also Covell's detailed remarks in J. Theodore Bent (ed.), *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant. I. The Diary of Master Thomas Dallam, 1599–1600. II. Extracts from the Diaries of Dr. John Covell, 1670–1679* (London, 1893), 283–85.

<sup>18</sup> Richard H. Popkin, "Three English Tellings of the Sabbatai Zevi Story," *Jewish History* 8 (1994): 43–54; Heyd, "The Jewish Quaker."

<sup>19</sup> Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches* (London, 1679). On Rycaut, see Sonia P. Anderson, *An English Consul in Turkey: Paul Rycaut at Smyrna, 1667–1678* (Oxford, 1989); Colin J. Heywood, "Sir Paul Rycaut, a Seventeenth Century Observer of the Ottoman State: Notes for a Study," in *English and Continental Views of the Ottoman Empire, 1500–1800* (ed. E. K. Shaw and C. J. Heywood; Los Angeles, 1972), 31–59;

As Busbecq and Smith had been, Rycaut was intrigued by a large shared public ritual, this time in Aleppo. "On the 15th of *April*, 1671," Rycaut wrote,

there was brought into *Aleppo* a little Copper-Vessel of Water, out of a strong imagination, that it was endued with a Telesmatical Vertue, to draw thereunto a sort of Birds which feed on Locusts, commonly called by the *Arabs*, *Smirmar*. . . . This Bird (as they report) hath so shrill a note, that the very sound of it will strike down a thousand Locusts at a time, and are such *Acridophagi*, that when they come in great numbers are sufficient to devour and destroy those vast swarms of Locusts . . . so that to be freed of this Plague to which the parts about *Aleppo* are greatly subject, no more happy or easie remedy could be found than something endued with a power attracting such beneficial and useful Guests . . . the [holy] Water was sent for and brought into the City with great pomp and solemnity. The procession was made at the *Southern Damascus* Gate, every Religion and Sect attending in their Habits, with the most formal Devotion imaginable, according to their different Rites and Ceremonies, every Nation bearing before them the respective Badges of their profession, *viz.* The Law, the Gospel, and the *Alchoran*, with Songs in their mouths according to their several Religions. The concourse of all sorts of people was exceeding great, and the Pageantry seven hours in acting; for the Water was drawn up over the Gate, and over all covered passages, and finally over the Castle Walls, where in a Mosch it was lodged with all reverence and devotion.<sup>20</sup>

Despite a minor clash between the Jewish and Christian communities during the procession, this was a genuine shared civic ritual. For modern audiences the story could be effectively marketed as a cheerful and harmless cultural tradition of Aleppo. However, Rycaut's main point in recounting the story was to demonstrate

how constant the minds of men, living in the *East*, are to their Traditions, and to keep up their fancy to any ancient superstition. . . . It is well known how much the Telesmatical Doctrine, which was anciently the wisdom, or rather folly of the Learned, prevailed in the *Eastern* Quarters of the World.<sup>21</sup>

Superstition for Rycaut, who on this matter seems to differ little from Guibert de Nogent, was deeply embedded in the Oriental psyche. As opposed to Busbecq, who contrasted popular superstition with the rational orthodoxy of the elite, Rycaut included local elites in his account of Oriental

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Linda T. Darling, "Ottoman Politics through British Eyes: Paul Rycaut's 'The Present State of the Ottoman Empire'," *Journal of World History* 5:1 (1994): 71–97.

<sup>20</sup> Rycaut, *The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches*, 376–79.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

superstition in an urban setting. The Aleppo ritual, he conjectured (in possible reference to Maimonides on the origin of idolatry), must have been “a durable remain of the *Sabean* Superstition.”<sup>22</sup>

The theme of shared superstitious beliefs in Oriental cultures was repeated by the learned divine John Covell (1638–1722), who had met Rycart in Izmir. In 1669 Covell was appointed chaplain to the English ambassador at Istanbul. His learned account of the Greek Church was published only in 1722, the year of his death, by which time he had become master of Christ’s College in Cambridge.<sup>23</sup> Covell also left a manuscript diary that was published by the Hakluyt society in the late nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> In his diary Covell described some shared religious practices in the Ottoman Empire:

You cannot imagine the strange superstition that is generally amongst the people of this countrey; Turkes, Jewes, Greekes, Armenians, all have their amulets and Telismes (talismans) and *phylacteria* about themselves, but especially about their children, their horses, their houses. . . . The Turkes have commonly their Telismans engraved on silver or gold; . . . there are peculiar arts of the making of these, but I count them all meer old wives’ conceits.<sup>25</sup>

Covell goes on to dismiss his Janissary’s attachment to the blood of bats (incidentally, an item much desired by John Greaves), along with Greek and Armenian beliefs in the walking of dead men and in exorcisms. However, it is telling that Covell mentions a “Scotchman here who much delighted and practised in such mysteries.” The (Catholic) Ragussan ambassador, he also noted, was particularly keen on magic and superstition. Ottoman society in the seventeenth century may indeed have been given to talismans and magic, but this should not have been unfamiliar to Europeans from home. What distinguished the Levant, I suggest, was the interreligious element of many of these activities, which struck European observers as a clear mark of the superstitious character of the East

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<sup>22</sup> Rycart, *The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches*, 380. Dionysius Vossius published *De Idololatria*, a Latin translation of Maimonides’ *Avodah Zarah* in 1641. Maimonides refers to the Sabians (Zabii), but in seventeenth-century English letters *Sabians* and *Sabeans* (a biblical ethnos) were often mixed, both historically and orthographically. See also Guy G. Stroumsa, “Thomas Hyde and the Birth of Zoroastrian Studies,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 26 (2002): 216–30; and recently idem, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010).

<sup>23</sup> John Covell, *Some Account of the Present Greek Church* (Cambridge, 1722).

<sup>24</sup> In Bent, *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 255.

as a whole. However, just as we saw in our opening examples from Egypt, and as likewise in the following examples, Europeans in the Ottoman sphere—sailors as well as ambassadors—were enthusiastic participants in “superstitious” activities.

As noted above, much European discourse about the Levant was polemically motivated. This prism forms another crucial aspect of the encounter of early modern Europeans with the religious life of the Ottoman Empire. “Superstition” did not refer only to obsession with magic and to popular, excessive, devotional practices. The term was frequently and pejoratively used in reference to established, dogmatic religion—in the case of the Ottoman Empire, to Islam. Following a very long tradition of Christian polemic against the person of Muhammad and against Islam, early modern Europeans often described Islam as a false religion, a superstition, based on lies, manipulation, violence, and lust.<sup>26</sup> In his *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, Rycaut often uses the phrases “Mahometan superstition” or “Turkish superstition” to describe Islam, together with other terms such as “easie religion” (153), “barbarism” (113), “sect” (103), and “pretension.” Whereas reason and faith, propagated by the “Sermons of a few poor Fishermen” characterized the rise of Christianity, “*Mahometanism*,” Rycaut argued, following a very traditional line of argument, “made its way with the Sword” and appealed to vulgar appetites. Islam’s irrationality was so great, he claimed, that even cultivated Turks could not agree with it. The only barrier between this elite and their acceptance of the Christian “Myserie of Godliness” was the cult of images, which, according to Rycaut, could hardly be justified by the overly subtle and too complex Greek theology:

[it is unlikely that] the Christians will ever be received by them with greater Authority, and more favourable inclination, until they acquit themselves of the scandal of Idolatry, which the Images and Pictures in their Churches seem to accuse them of in the eyes and judgement of the *Turks*, who are not versed in the subtle distinctions of Schoolmen, in the limitations and restrictions of that worship, and the evasions of their Doctors, matters not

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<sup>26</sup> Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh, 1960; rev. ed.: Oxford, 1993); Kenneth M. Setton, *Western Hostility to Islam and Prophecies of Turkish Doom* (Philadelphia, 1992); Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008).

only sufficient to puzzle and distract the gross heads of *Turks*, but to strain the wits of learned Christians to clear them from that imputation.<sup>27</sup>

Rycaut is somewhat aware here that the superstitious (to him) Turks themselves regard Greek icon worship as a form of superstitious idolatry, and hence, he is aware also of the relative nature of such terms. Yet the polemical tone dominates his observations.

Whereas above we have noted the religious diversity of the Ottoman Empire as a marker of Eastern superstition as a whole, for Rycaut, Islam as an entity, the “Mahometan superstition,” was in itself a corrupted and decayed mélange of ethnicities, languages, and nations:

and it is strange to consider, that from all parts of the world, some of the most dissolute and desperate in wickedness, should flock to these Dominions, to become members and professors of the *Mahometan* superstition; . . . the blood of the *Turks* is so mixed with that of all sorts of Languages and Nations, that non of them can derive his lineage from the ancient blood of the *Saracens*.<sup>28</sup>

The outcome is a degraded religion, a superstition indeed, and a degraded society, which were created by an imbalanced mix of disparate elements.<sup>29</sup>

Greek Orthodox Christianity was viewed by Europeans with either despair or admiration; often with both.<sup>30</sup> The Greeks, all European observers agreed, suffered badly under Ottoman rule. However, as inhabitants of the East, they too showed marks of excessive ceremonial and superstition, or “Ottomanisation.” As Asaph Ben-Tov has noted, German Lutherans had already become disillusioned with contemporary Greeks by the late sixteenth century and had lost any hope of relating them to the pristine primitive Church.<sup>31</sup> This sentiment, albeit in a less accentuated mode, pervades seventeenth-century English observations on the Greek

<sup>27</sup> Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire, Containing the Maxims of the Turkish Politie, the Most Material Points of the Mahometan Religion, Their Sects and Heresies, Their Convents and Religious Votaries, Their Military Discipline . . .* (London, 1667), 104.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>29</sup> See also Peter Harrison, *‘Religion’ and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1990), 100–112.

<sup>30</sup> See recently Hélène Pignot, “A Trip to the Origins of Christianity: Sir Paul Rycaut’s and Rev. Thomas Smith’s Accounts of the Greek Church in the Seventeenth Century,” *Studies in Travel Writing* 13 (2009): 193–205; Karen Hartnup, *‘On the Beliefs of the Greeks’: Leo Allatios and Popular Orthodoxy* (Leiden, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Asaph Ben-Tov, *Lutheran Humanists and Greek Antiquity: Melanchthonian Scholarship between Universal History and Pedagogy* (Leiden, 2009), Chapter 2.

Church. Nevertheless, Smith and Rycaut, although highly critical of certain elements in Greek religious practice, on the whole offer an optimistic vision of the Greek Church. Certainly it is now in the darkness of neglect and servitude; yet the entrenched keeping with tradition is what holds it together and keeps it alive. Thus excessive ceremonial and ignorance are, depending upon the writer's inclinations, either Greek superstition or a blessed guardian of the Church.

In his account of the tour of the Seven Churches of Asia, a favoured religious-antiquarian field trip practiced by some members of the European community in Istanbul and Izmir, Thomas Smith condemned the local Christians for their neglect of their own material sacred heritage:

But a sadder fate [than that of the shrines of the Holy Land] seemed to hang over the *Seven Churches of Asia*, founded by the *Apostles*, and to which *the eternal Son of God* vouchsafed to send those Epistles recorded in the book of the *Revelation* of St. *John*, which by the unpardonable carelessness of the *Greeks*, (unless that horrid stupidity, into which their slavery has cast them, may plead some excuse herein) have lain so long neglected; they giving us no account of their ruins, and the *Western Christians* either not caring or not daring to visit them.<sup>32</sup>

The condemnatory tone continues in Smith's separate account of the Greek Church:

It must be sadly acknowledged that there is a great deal of Superstition mixt in their publick Service and Offices: such is their perfuming the Church, the painted Figures, the holy Table, the Deacons and others with their Incense-pots.

Smith also chastised the Greeks for an excessive devotion to Mary as mother of God.<sup>33</sup> However, for Smith these very same practices—repetitive, mindless, baseless devotions—offered a lifeline to the imperiled Greek Church. In other words, Greek superstition, which was centered upon tradition and inexplicable customs, was also seen as the saving miracle that kept the Church alive. I quote again from Smith:

Next to the miraculous and gracious providence of God, I ascribe the preservation of *Christianity* among them to the strict and religious observation of the Festivals and Fasts of the Church; this being the happy and blessed

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Smith, *Remarks Upon the Manners, Religion and Government of the Turks Together with a Survey of the Seven Churches of Asia, as They Now Lye in Their Ruines, and a Brief Description of Constantinople* (London, 1678), 205–6.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, *An Account of the Greek Church*, 231.

effects of those antient and pious Institutions, the total neglect of which would soon introduce ignorance and a sensible decay of Piety and Religion in other countries besides those of the Levant. This certainly is the chiefest preservative of Religion in those Eastern Countries against the poison of the Mahometan superstition.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, Smith presents a benevolent Eastern superstition, based upon a strict observation of Christian tradition and institutions, as the most significant barrier against another Eastern superstition—the poisonous “Mahometan superstition.” For sure, Smith may have been referring to Greek superstition as a lamentable, last resort solution for the preservation of Christianity in the Ottoman sphere. Nevertheless, it is important to note his multiple and flexible usage of this notion within a single paragraph.

Rycaut, too, praises the devout and non-cerebral character of Greek Christianity: The monks of Mount Athos may not be able to offer a scholarly commentary on their liturgy, but at least they know it by heart. They are, for Rycaut,

good simple men of godly lives, given greatly to devotion and acts of mortification; for as *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*, so these men discoursing with a lively sense of God and of his Service, we may without over-much credulity, or easiness of belief, conclude them not only to be real and moral good men, but such also as are something touched with the Spirit of God; whose devotion and affection to his Commands and Precepts, shall carry them farther in their way to Heaven, than the Wisdom of the most profound Philosophers, or the wisest Clerks. *And that such people are found in the world, endowed with such Priviledges, in the Countries of the Grand Oppressour of Christendom, to God's Name be Glory and Honour now and for ever, Amen.*<sup>35</sup>

Rycaut's sermonizing paragraph goes beyond Smith's functional praise of Greek ritual religiosity, to hail a sort of Greek *ignorantia sacra* as a valued religious principle, much missed in Europe.

The final section of this essay will look to the state of religion in Europe as another, overlapping context for the discussion of Eastern superstition. “Writing the other” as a way of reflecting on one's own backyard is a well-known mechanism in travel and ethnographic literature—regardless

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>35</sup> Rycaut, *The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches*, 262–63.



of the truth value of facts transmitted, the foreign serves to raise and elaborate issues that concern audiences at home.<sup>36</sup> This mechanism is fully at work in the case of early modern reporting on Eastern religion and superstition.

An early illustrative example is given by Busbecq's learned conversation with the Grand Vizier, Rüstem Pasha (ca. 1505–1561). On one occasion the two aristocrats held a friendly conversation about religion and salvation. Rüstem, having failed to win Busbecq over to Islam and thus save his soul, paused for a moment and then suggested to his European companion that

those who have lived holy and innocent lives on this earth will share eternal bliss, whatever religion they may have practiced.<sup>37</sup>

Working strictly within the genre of the learned dialogue, this perhaps fictive conversation could potentially teach historians of Ottoman religion something about unorthodox, relativistic ideas as espoused by some members of the Ottoman elite. More significantly, however, considering the timing and location of the publication of the *Letters*—the troubled Antwerp and Paris of the 1580s—the conciliatory observation bears quite explicitly on the question of religious conflict in late sixteenth-century Europe. Put in the mouth of a Muslim magistrate, a fearsome enemy of Christian Europe, the statement acquires special force, and echoes the chastising remarks on the state of religion in Europe made to Sir John Mandeville by the Mamluk Sultan of Egypt (in a surely fictive audience).<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, Rycaut's less polished observations on both Ottoman Islam and Ottoman Christianity often make sense only when placed against the background of the state of religion in England. The Greek Church had provoked intense interest in Anglican circles throughout the seventeenth century, in the context of English debates over the history and nature of the primitive Church. In particular, in response to Presbyterian and radical attacks on the Anglican establishment, the status of priests and bishops in that idealized primitive Church became a central question. As Justin Champion has argued, Anglicans appealed to a primitive Church which

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<sup>36</sup> For an exemplary study developing this approach see François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History* (Berkeley, 1988).

<sup>37</sup> *The Turkish Letters*, 120.

<sup>38</sup> *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (ed. and trans. C. W. R. D. Moseley; London, 1983), 107–8. On this tradition see John V. Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (Oxford, 2009).



could demonstrate on the one hand independence from Rome and, on the other, the antiquity of episcopacy. The Orthodox tradition, in the Anglican image, preserved some of that perfect state, and could serve therefore as an authenticating instrument for English priesthood and episcopacy.<sup>39</sup> Rycaut's retellings of his encounters with local Greeks are illuminated by this important context. Some Greeks told Rycaut that the power of their priesthood to elucidate Scripture and to consecrate the Eucharist, among other qualities, could only be explained by some mystery that marks their office. This priesthood, according to Rycaut,

is...indeed the main Pillar and Basis which supports a Church.... [I]t is the Fence and Hedge of the Sheepfold. This being broken down, The Sheep stray, and Satan enters with his seed of Heresie and Schism; for what can hinder men from running into Prodigies of Fancies and wild Opinions, where every man is his own Pastor and his own Bishop?<sup>40</sup>

For Rycaut, the central role of priesthood justifies the Greek practice of paying for the administration of sacraments. The contemporary Greek Church thus serves him as a model for obedience and respect for the clergy, who hold the mysterious power of spiritual guidance. Even the Turks are respectful toward Christian clergy, Rycaut emphasizes. Thus, what in some contexts may be seen as superstitious and unreasonable devotion is now praised as the true basis for forming a Church. The message is clear: it is an Anglican message that is aimed at an English public in an England where these very issues are fiercely debated.

Conversely, the heretical Independents, according to Rycaut, seem to have copied their organization and ideals from the Muslim Ottomans:

[C]onsidering the manner of their designation to the Religious office, the little difference between the Clergy and the Layetie, and the manner of their single Government in Parochial Congregations, may not unaptly seem to square with the independency in *England*, from which original pattern and

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<sup>39</sup> Justin A. I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge, 1992), 5–24. See also Geoffrey J. Cuming, "Eastern Liturgies and Anglican Divines, 1510–1662," in *The Orthodox Churches and the West* (ed. D. Baker; Oxford, 1976), 231–38; Alastair Hamilton, "The English Interest in the Arabic-Speaking Christians," in Russell, *The 'Arabick' Interest*, 30–53; idem, "Eastern Churches and Western Scholarship," in *Rome Reborn: The Vatican Library and Renaissance Culture* (ed. A. Grafton; Washington, 1993), 225–50; Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Church of England and the Greek Church in the Time of Charles I," in *Religious Motivation: Biographical and Sociological Problems for the Church Historian* (ed. D. Baker; Oxford, 1978), 213–40.

<sup>40</sup> Rycaut, *The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches*, 16–17.

example our Sectaries and Phanatick Reformers appear to have drawn their Coppy.<sup>41</sup>

Rycaut here uses the well-known rhetorical weapon of likening one detested religious group to another. Lack of respect for a hierarchal, centralized church aligns the fanaticism of the English Independents with Islam. Rycaut did not miss an opportunity to equate Christian adversaries with Islam. He comments, for example, that Muslims, English rebels, and Catholics share the false argument that God's favor is proved by success, even if wrongly achieved by violence and cruelty:

The success of the *Mahometan* arms produced another argument for the confirmation of their faith, and made it a principle; That whatsoever prospers, hath God for the Author; and by how much more successeful have been their Wars, by so much the more hath God been an owner of their cause and Religion. And the same argument (if I am not mistaken) in the times of the late Rebellion in *England*, was made use of by many, to intitle God to their cause, and make him the Author of their thriving sin, because their wickedness prospered, and could trample on all holy and humane rights with impunity. And I have known that the *Romanists* have judged the afflictions and almost subversion of the Church of *England*, to be a token of Gods desertion and disclaim of her profession, forgetting the Persecutions and Martyrdoms of the Primitive Saints, and that the Church of God is built in sorrow and established with patience and passive graces.<sup>42</sup>

The Church of England in its period of distress and sorrow resembled the persecuted primitive Church and carried the true spirit of Christianity, while Puritans and Catholics subscribed to the power of the sword and the principle of success, the traditional markers of Islamic "superstition."

In other cases, however, Rycaut admires the Muslim state as a healthy and correct model of Church–state relations. For example, the state's care of its religious institutions and of its clergy is enviable:

For so large benevolence is given to places destined to Gods service, that as some compute, one third of the Lands of the whole Empire are allotted and set out to a holy use; much to the shame of those who pretend to the name of Christians.<sup>43</sup>

Rycaut goes as far as to claim that political order and stability rely first on religious obedience. This is a lesson to be learned from the Turks. The

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<sup>41</sup> Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, 109.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

comparison with England is explicit and not left for the modern historian to discover:

And may all Christians learn this Lesson from the *Turks*, and adde this principle to the Fundamentals of their Religion, as well as to their Laws. None can more experimentally preach this Doctrine to the World than *England*, who no sooner threw off her Obedience and Religion to her Prince, but (as if that vertue had been the only bar to all other Enormities and Sins) she was deprived of all other Ecclesiastical and Civil Rights, and in all her capacities and relations deflowred and prophaned by impious and unhallowed hands.<sup>44</sup>

Writing very shortly after the Restoration, Rycaut praises obedience as a religious principle that should be imitated by Christians and by still-wounded England in particular. Throughout his treatise on the Ottoman Empire, Rycaut normally describes an irrational, vain, and warlike “Mohametan superstition,” suitable to the slavish character of the Turks (and Easterners as a whole), who are oppressed by the tyranny of the Grand Signor. In this passage, however, the same religious and political arrangement is portrayed in very complimentary terms. Islamic obedience to a religiously sanctioned ruler should be imitated and fully adopted by Christians.

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In this essay, I have attempted to extend current discussions on the notion of the superstitious in early modern Europe into the Levant. Traditionally seen as the fountain and source of evil heresy, the Levant as encountered and transmitted by early modern Europeans was, in a sense, a scene of endemic and wild superstition; this portrayal was in keeping with a long-established set of images. However, when examined closely—in our case through the lens of a small group of texts, mainly composed by English observers of the second half of the seventeenth century—the sources reveal a richer and more nuanced picture. The superstitions of the Levant, I have argued, were often constructed to mirror European religious phenomena. This textual mechanism shapes every European utterance on Eastern religions and superstitions. In the case of straight anti-Islamic or anti-Orthodox polemics, I have also demonstrated the malleability of the notion of Eastern superstitions. We have seen how

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 24.

perceived superstitious elements in one context may be portrayed as markers of true religion in another, sometimes within a single paragraph.

The structurally plural religious reality of Ottoman trading centers, where Latins, Armenians, Copts, Persians, and Jews, to name but a few groups, mingled on a daily basis, presented Western Europeans with a far more diverse society than the one they knew in Europe. Even in areas of relatively significant religious diversity within Europe itself, the concept of shared ritual was almost inconceivable during the confessional age. When Europeans in the Levant observed shared devotions in action, it is in this out of the ordinary context that they often located the superstitious. Overall, then, I have attempted to destabilize any rigid notion of “Eastern superstition” by reading European pronouncements against particular and local European contexts. We should also remember that behind these well-crafted texts stood actual human encounters, which together constructed the wide spectrum of religion in the early modern Mediterranean. In between the lines, we have had a glimpse of the active role played by Western Europeans themselves in promoting and enacting so-called oriental superstition—purchasing mummies and talismans, seeking to acquire the blood of bats, and chasing the bodies of the excommunicated during the night. Thus the question goes beyond “mirroring” and “othering.” Ultimately, we should question overly sharp distinctions between the European and the Ottoman religious spheres and should explore the superstitious within a continuum of encounters and practices across the early modern Mediterranean.

PAGAN GODS IN LATE SEVENTEENTH- AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY  
GERMAN UNIVERSITIES: A SKETCH\*

Asaph Ben-Tov

It is arguably the hilariously unpleasant character of Damis, the young scholar in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Der junge Gelehrte* (*The Young Scholar*), which makes the piece so entertaining. Himself an eighteen-year-old student in Leipzig when he wrote the comedy in 1747, Lessing mercilessly pokes fun at the arrogance of young scholars. The protagonist is the ostentatious proprietor of a command of Greek and Latin, as well as Hebrew—the play opens with Damis's futile attempt at impressing his manservant with a Hebrew copy of Maimonides' *Yad HaChazakah*. While the incorrigible Damis is only nineteen, and for all his polymathy amusingly childish, he serves Lessing as a caricature of a very old and revered scholarly tradition. The play ends with Damis's failure to win an essay competition on Monads announced by the Berlin Academy. Ignoring Leibniz, and indeed metaphysics and natural philosophy altogether, Damis's pedantic essay, concentrating on the etymology and ancient uses of the term, is promptly dismissed by the Academy; an outrage which convinces him to leave Germany and settle elsewhere, where his towering genius would at last be acknowledged. With his penchant for etymologies, Damis's learning is as out of tune as his unpleasant character. *Der junge Gelehrte*, composed two decades before *Laokoon*, is among other things, I would argue, a brilliant parody of the old tradition of Classical scholarship the young Lessing may have encountered.

While late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century universities, as is becoming ever more evident, were more innovative than was formerly assumed, the aim of the present paper is to offer a preliminary sketch of some lines of development in a distinctly old-fashioned scholastic tradition

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\* Among my many debts to Michael Heyd is his introducing me to the intriguing and understudied world of early modern university disputations. It is therefore with the greatest pleasure, gratitude, and hesitation that I present him with this preliminary sketch. The present study is based on a paper delivered at the German Studies Association Conference in St Paul, Minnesota (2008). I am grateful to my co-panellists and to Andreas Blank for their valuable comments. Needless to say, I am solely responsible for any shortcomings. This paper was researched and written during my postdoctoral Yad Hanadiv fellowship spent at the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel.

at several seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Lutheran universities of the Holy Roman Empire; namely, the university disputation. The fact that the tradition of university disputations has become alien to us and was ridiculed by many of its contemporaries has often obscured the fact that this academic tradition was still alive at German universities well into the eighteenth century. More concretely, I wish to explore the role of this tradition within academic life by tracing the treatment of Greco-Roman paganism within the traditional framework of the disputation, relying for this study on the written records of the disputations that have come down to us and related sources. Composed for the most part by orthodox theology professors at Lutheran universities from the 1660s through the end of the eighteenth century, these records of academic debate concerning the religious aspects of antiquity portray both the remarkable endurance of a scholastic framework in Germany and, at the same time, the changing perceptions of antiquity within that tradition.

With its roots in high medieval scholasticism, the early modern disputation was one of the primary forms of academic communication in the seventeenth-century Republic of Letters.<sup>1</sup> Based on the assumption that the aim of scholarship was to attain and defend the truth, rather than necessarily to acquire new knowledge, the practice of the early modern

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<sup>1</sup> Recent years have witnessed an ever growing interest in early modern disputations and dissertations, especially in Germany. The still standard study of the genre and its function in early modern academia is that of Ewald Horn, *Die Disputationen und Promotionen an den deutschen Universitäten* (Leipzig, 1893). For a more recent overview see Hanspeter Marti, "Dissertationen und Promotionen an frühneuzeitlichen Universitäten des deutschen Sprachraums: Versuch eines skizzenhaften Überblicks," in *Promotionen und Promotionswesen an deutschen Hochschulen der Frühmoderne* (ed. R. A. Müller; Köln, 2001), 1–20. For consideration of the *longue durée* evolution of the modern dissertation from its disputational roots, based to a great extent, though not exclusively, on German sources, see Kuming (Kevin) Chang, "From Oral Disputation to Written Text: The Transformation of the Dissertation in Early Modern Europe," *History of Universities* 19:2 (2004): 129–87. For a brief consideration of seventeenth-century disputations as a source for the (surprising) vitality of post-Thirty-Years-War German universities, and for a brief but insightful discussion of some of the generic and confessional characteristics of these disputations see R. J. Evans, "German Universities after the Thirty Years War," *History of Universities* 1 (1981): 169–90; Evans's study is based on a large collection of German disputations in the Bodleian Library. For an insightful consideration of disputations as part of a network of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century learned communication see Martin Gierl, "Korrespondenzen, Disputationen, Zeitschriften: Wissensorganisation und Entwicklung der gelehrten Medienrepublik zwischen 1670 und 1730," in *Macht des Wissens: Die Entstehung der modernen Wissenschaftsgesellschaft* (ed. R. van Dülmen and S. Rauschenbach; Köln, 2004), 417–38. A recent study by Bernd Roling amply demonstrates just how fecund a terrain is presented by early modern disputations: *Drachen und Sirenen: Die Rationalisierung und Abwicklung der Mythologie an den europäischen Universitäten* (Leiden, 2010).

disputation, like its medieval forebears, was, in principle, an attempt to reach this truth through a dialectical process of debating the answers to given questions (*quaestiones*); or ever more frequently in the resurrected early modern disputation, affirming or rebutting a given thesis. First and foremost, the university disputation was a well-regulated ceremonial affair, at which students and faculty members were to display their argumentative adroitness, as well as learning, in a clearly structured debate presided over by one of the professors (*praeses*), who presented the question or thesis at hand and who would later deliver the verdict. In the cases where a written disputation has come down to us, the *praeses* is usually the disputation's actual author.<sup>2</sup>

The live disputation had various forms and purposes in early modern universities. Most university statutes required professors to dispute at least once a year,<sup>3</sup> and aspiring candidates were required to dispute successfully as one of the requirements for attaining a degree. Disputations were occasionally required of students as proof of their progress, either by their parents (*iussu parentum*) or to satisfy the administrators of a stipend of which they were beneficiaries.<sup>4</sup> A formal characteristic of the classical disputation, both medieval and early modern (up to a point), is the assumption that the answer to the given question, or the defense or refutation of the given thesis, pivots on definitions and distinctions to be made between debated terms. Thus, disputations usually begin with a careful definition of the subject matter; successive sections elaborate the argument on the basis of this preliminary definition; and the concluding arguments are syllogistically derived from the basic premises which these definitions set forth. Hence, disputations composed by scholars with a grounding in Classical philology tend to open with a consideration of etymologies (some of them far fetched by modern standards), as a preamble to the argument being made.

A case in point is the disputation on the legal status of Christian converts to Judaism, *De apostasia Christianorum ad Iudaismum*,<sup>5</sup> presented to the law faculty of the University of Erfurt on 22 April 1738 by a certain

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<sup>2</sup> Horn, *Die Disputationen und Promotionen*, 51–72, points out the difficulty of determining the authors. See also Evans, "German Universities after the Thirty Years War," esp. 176.

<sup>3</sup> Horn, *Die Disputationen und Promotionen*, 6–13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–25.

<sup>5</sup> *Dissertatio inauguralis iuridica, de apostasia Christianorum ad Iudaismum quam Deo Duce, in perantiqua Vniversitate Erfordiensis, ex decreto et auctoritate illustris Jctorum ordinis, praeside Dn. Henrico Melchiore Schütte, Jcto, Facultatis Jurid. et Philos. Adessore, nec*



Carl Heinrich Mushard, as a requirement for attaining the doctor's degree; composed, in all likelihood, by the presiding assessor Heinrich Melchior Schütte (1690–1754).<sup>6</sup> The central argument Schütte makes is that although they are committing a terrible sin, these converts should not incur any legal sanctions beyond the disadvantages of assuming the Jews' restricted legal status along with their conversion. This argument, made at a time when in many territories a Christian's conversion to Judaism (however rare) was a capital offense, pivots on the distinction between *peccatum* (fault, sin) and *delictum* (crime). Yet even this legal disputation opens with a detailed consideration of the etymology of *apostasia* (ἀποστασία). In an argument based on definitions of and distinctions between concepts, the etymological scrutiny of a key concept is an integral part of any attempt to gauge its implications. Since the disputations considered here are based on accumulated philological knowledge of Greco-Roman literature, this mode of argumentation may seem to indicate an inherent tension between the basically accumulative and inductive nature of philological scholarship and the deductive mechanism of scholastic argumentation. We shall consider this tension below.

Though these academic disputations were embedded in an old scholarly tradition, their composers were very much men of their day, and as such highly attentive to the confessional and philosophical storms raging about them. As innocuous as considerations of antique paganism may seem, the following analysis will attempt to show that these disputations were no detached musings on distant antiquity, but alert reactions to the contemporary debates which engaged the Republic of Letters; these accounts were poignantly relevant to contemporary confessional strife and to the religious and philosophical questions a learned Christian of the time would entertain about the world and its Maker. The broader debates concerning pagan antiquity under the aegis of the Enlightenment were vividly portrayed by Frank Manuel half a century ago.<sup>7</sup> The university tradition considered here, however, followed its own lines of development, and cannot be dismissed out of hand as an antiquated relic, as it was by Manuel. These sources provide an insight into the academic, religious, and

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*non Politices Prof. Publ. Ordinari. pro summis in vtroque Jure Honoribus et Privilegiis doctorabilibus consequendis* (Erfurt, 1738).

<sup>6</sup> Schütte had been an assessor in the law faculty since 1736 and was to become a professor (*extraordinarius*) in 1744. See Johann Georg Meusel, *Lexikon der vom Jahr 1750 bis 1800 verstorbenen deutschen Schriftsteller* (15 vols.; Leipzig, 1812), 12: 500–501.

<sup>7</sup> Frank Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959).



methodological conservatism in German Protestant universities, and yet at the same time present us with a challenging example of adaptability to Enlightenment ideas and the emergence of non-Christianocentric views of human phenomena within a distinctly old-fashioned academic framework. Without wishing to argue for an inexorable march to modernity, I propose that a consideration of these usually overlooked academic sources on antiquity (too scholastic and inelegant to interest most students of the Classical tradition, and too arcanelly Latin to interest many students of the Enlightenment) may offer an instructive instance of Enlightenment in unexpected quarters. Before stepping into the arena we must first pay a visit to the Netherlands, to an Amsterdam scholar—one of the most impressive representatives of seventeenth-century scholarship, who died a decade before the composition of the first disputation considered here.

One of the works consulted most frequently by late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century scholars writing about paganism was the monumental *De theologia gentili* (*On Pagan Theology*)<sup>8</sup> by the Dutch scholar Johann Gerard Vossius (1577–1649), the complete edition of which appeared posthumously in Amsterdam in 1668.<sup>9</sup> This work, comprising a massive encyclopedia of pagan belief and ritual, has a twofold aim: to provide a monumental record of “pagan idolatry” and to offer an account of the natural knowledge of God. Though severely criticized in the later eighteenth century, Vossius’s work was greatly admired in the latter half of the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries. It offers a seventeenth-century study of natural religion—a field of study and speculation which, in different form and with different objectives, would flower in the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Significantly, Vossius analyzes pagan phenomena along Christian criteria, and then classifies them according to bifurcated divisions and subdivisions of religious phenomena emerging from a Protestant understanding of religion.

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<sup>8</sup> Though this is the short title used by contemporaries, the full title is itself instructive and can be translated as follows: *Nine Books on Pagan Theology and Christian Physiology: Or on the Origin and Progress of Idolatry, and on the Wonders of Nature by which Man is Led to God*.

<sup>9</sup> Johann Gerard Vossius, *De theologia gentili, et physiologia Christiana; sive de origine ac progressu idololatriæ; deque naturæ mirandis, quibus homo adducitur ad Deum, Libri IX* (Amsterdam, 1668).

<sup>10</sup> See brief discussion in Cornelius Simon Maria Rademaker, *Life and Work of Gerardus Joannes Vossius (1577–1649)* (Assen, 1981), 307–9. See also Nicholas Wickenden, *G. J. Vossius and the Humanist Concept of History* (Assen, 1993), 27–30. As Wickenden points out, natural religion for Vossius, as opposed to some of his later readers, was never a substitute for revealed religion but a complementary perspective.

The massive work is prefaced by a schematic chart dividing the nine books according to a set of criteria beginning with the division of worship, symbolic or actual. Actual worship is subdivided into the worship of substances and that of accidents. The former category is subdivided in turn, into the categories of the actual worship of a spiritual substance, corporeal substance, or a hybrid substance. The category of corporeal substances is then subdivided into the actual worship of universal corporeal substance (the entire universe), and the worship of particular substances: elements, meteors, humans, beasts, birds, fish, insects, plants, and fossils. The subdivision of worshipped spiritual substances is classified by nature as highest, middle, and lowest; i.e., the supreme Deity; the benevolent and malevolent angels; and finally the lowest spiritual substances, i.e., spirits and ghosts. Once this conceptual map has been charted, a vast array of Greco-Roman pagan phenomena is described and analyzed by Vossius, over the course of more than a thousand double-columned folio pages.

Despite its mammoth proportions and repeated excurses, this work is no haphazard aggregation of baroque polymathy, but a carefully constructed edifice. As deeply as Vossius may delve into the minutiae of ancient worship, as he understood it, each section's place within the general scheme is clear, and the methodological backbone keeping the massive body of learning together is a framework of some basic, clearly defined criteria, deriving from a scholastic definition of superstition and idolatry. The massive corpus of evidence deriving from Vossius' philological scholarship on the matter (and in some cases from eyewitness accounts of contemporary "idolatry" among the natives of America) is sorted and construed according to these preestablished criteria. Working from the traditional assumption of a monotheistic origin for all polytheistic religions,<sup>11</sup> Vossius categorizes the fall into paganism under the two rubrics of atheism and superstition: that is, either the lack of recognition of a deity and its providence, or the wrong-headed allocation of worship where it does not belong—the worship of a nonexistent deity or the worship of the true God by false means. This is a paraphrase of Thomas Aquinas's definition of superstition in the *Summa theologiae*.<sup>12</sup> Religiosity is a virtue, and yet it is susceptible to the vice of abandoning the Aristotelian mean. Not that God could ever be

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<sup>11</sup> One elaborate argument for paganism as a form of lapsed monotheism was articulated by Caspar Peucer (1525–1602) in his treatise on forms of divination, *De praecipuis divinationum generibus* (Wittenberg, 1553). This treatise underwent numerous later editions and was still being quoted in late seventeenth-century university disputations.

<sup>12</sup> *Summa theologiae*, II<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup>, 92.

worshipped to excess, as Thomas Aquinas stresses, but that an allocation of divine worship to the created world rather than the Creator, or a false manner of worship of the supreme Deity, constitutes idolatry.

As the following cases will show, this scholastic definition attained a new meaning in anti-Catholic polemics, and the need to refute outlooks that Vossius terms atheist would attain added poignancy in the decades following his death. Quoting Seneca's *Epistle 117* with approval,<sup>13</sup> Vossius agrees with the Roman Stoic that the sheer universality of a natural belief in a deity is in itself an indication of that deity's existence.<sup>14</sup> This Senecan quote, as well as other references to Classical authors made by Vossius in *De theologia gentili*, will crop up repeatedly in university disputations. More importantly, we shall encounter the same methodological etymologically based deductive approach throughout the second half of the seventeenth century and first decades of the eighteenth.<sup>15</sup>

University disputations are by their very nature relatively short and do not attempt the massive display of erudition embodied by Vossius's work. The spirit and assumptions underlying these works of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are nonetheless much akin to, and indeed refer to, Vossius's work and borrow from it repeatedly. Thus for instance the 1669 Leipzig *Historical Disputation on the Idolatrous Worship of Beasts*<sup>16</sup> written by the Lutheran theologian Valentin Alberti (1635–1697), a staunch orthodox opponent of Pietism as well as the theories of natural law propounded by Hugo Grotius, Christian Thomasius, and Samuel von Puffendorf, follows Vossius closely.<sup>17</sup> Presented by Elias Geisler for the purpose of attaining the bachelor's degree, this disputation is typical of its kind in starting with detailed definitions of polytheism and

<sup>13</sup> Though Vossius regrets Seneca's plural in asserting the evident existence of the gods (*deos esse*), rather than the one God, as the Reformed polymath would have wished.

<sup>14</sup> Seneca, *Ep. 117*, 6: "Multum dare solemus praesumptioni omnium hominum et apud nos veritatis argumentum est aliquid omnibus videri; tamquam deos esse inter alia hoc colligimus, quod omnibus insita de dis opinio est nec ulla gens usquam est adeo extra leges moresque proiecta ut non aliquos deos credat."

This quote from Seneca is repeatedly used in the later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century disputations. Seneca, of course, has his own early modern reception history, but the repeated use of these particular lines in exactly the same context is one indication, among many, of the broad appropriation of Vossius's work by later scholars. See, e.g., Heinrich Jakob van Bashuysen, *Disputatio paradoxa de Iside, Magna Dearum Matre, ad locum Suet. In Othone, C.XII.§.5* (Zerbst, 1719), A1<sup>v</sup>, discussed below.

<sup>15</sup> Needless to say, the general methodological framework may not necessarily be a borrowing from Vossius, but a commonly shared heritage.

<sup>16</sup> *Disputatio Historica de Cultu Idololatrico Bestiarum* (Leipzig, 1669).

<sup>17</sup> See *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, s.v.

superstition (taken from Vossius), and then adding its own Porphyrian tree of beasts and a careful definition of worship (*cultus*), before enumerating the historical instances of idolatrous worship of beasts. That these phenomena are the result of a degeneration of human religiosity is clear to the author, though he argues for the probability of animal worship being a phenomenon stemming from a later stage of human deprivation. The first stages of idolatry, he argues, were in all likelihood solar and astral worship. The emergence of idolatry itself, Alberti argues, was the fruit of fallen human nature, diabolical wiles, and human malice.<sup>18</sup> The philological evidence brought forward is fairly extensive, yet is clearly subservient to the illustration of (Protestant) categories of worship, carefully defined at the outset, a form followed by disputations up to the 1740s.

While the sheer number of university disputations dedicated to ancient paganism may at first seem surprising, it comes as no surprise that these disputations, composed mostly by theologians, had ulterior motives in dealing with this subject, and often echoed vehement theological and philosophical debates on “serious matters” raging at the time. Three centuries after their composition, the yellowing pages of these forgotten works still glitter with the relish with which Protestant professors drew parallels between “pagan idolatry” and what they saw as its Catholic equivalents. One example among many is the disputation *Papism—Paganism that is: A philological-theological disputation expounding a comparison of the two* (1664),<sup>19</sup> composed by the Wittenberg theology professor and Superintendent General, Johann Christoph Seld (1612–1672).<sup>20</sup> Seld based his work on a careful and tendentious set of definitions of Catholicism and paganism. Interestingly, just as paganism is portrayed as a fall from original monotheism, Catholicism for Seld follows a parallel course of corruption, dated in his view to Christian antiquity itself, with the assimilation of the Christian community in Rome to the iniquitous ways of the city.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Disputatio Historica*, A2<sup>v</sup>–A3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> *Papismus, Gentilismus; hoc est: Disputatio philologico-theologica, utriusque comparisonem proponens, intimioremque cognationem exhibens* (Cobourg, 1664).

<sup>20</sup> See Christian Gottlieb Jöcher, *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1751), s.v.

<sup>21</sup> *Papismus Gentilismus*, B1<sup>v</sup>. The structural predominance of definitions is also evident in a dissertation Seld composed fourteen years earlier, as adjunct at the philosophical faculty, on the nature and role of universities. This seemingly innocuous treatise also begins with a detailed set of definitions and etymologies, as the first step to establishing his survey on universities. *Dissertatio de Academia . . . sub praesidio Dn. Johannis Christophori Seldii, Facult. Philosoph. adjuncti, & h.t. decani* (Wittenberg, 1650).

Equating Catholicism with paganism was not an unusual line of argument for late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Protestant polemicists. One prominent non-German example worth mentioning is *A Letter from Rome* (1729) by the Cambridge librarian and clergyman Conyers Middleton (1683–1750). A detailed and meticulously biased of contemporary Roman Catholic practices and his thorough acquaintance with Roman antiquity led Middleton to conclude:

What opinion then can we have of the present practice of the *Church of Rome*, but that by a change only of *name*, they have found means to retain the *thing*; and by substituting *their Saints* in the place of the *old Demigods*, have but set up *Idols of their own*, instead of those of the *Forefathers*?<sup>22</sup>

Though Middleton was perhaps better known to his German contemporaries for his massive Cicero biography, it is worth noting that *A Letter from Rome* was translated into German in 1738.<sup>23</sup> The translator, who signed his initials G. S. C. in his dedication to the mayor of Hamburg, Rütger Rulant III (1665–1742),<sup>24</sup> celebrates the marvelous achievement of Middleton's anti-Catholic polemics. Middleton, the translator avows, has posited such an accurate and sufficient argument for the congruence of Catholicism with ancient paganism, that, thanks to his accuracy, there can be no escape for Catholics.<sup>25</sup>

More than three decades later, in a similar vein, we find a Leipzig disputation presided over by Christian Flemig, *On the Perspiration of Pagan*

<sup>22</sup> I have used the fifth edition of Conyers Middleton, *A Letter from Rome, Shewing an exact Conformity between Popery and Paganism: or, The Religion of the present Romans, derived from that of the Heathen Ancestors* (London, 1742), 159.

<sup>23</sup> Herrn D. Conyers Midletons [sic], *der Academie zu Cambridge vornehmsten Bibliothecarii, Schreiben aus Rom, Darinn eine genaue Uebereinstimmung des Pabstthums mit dem Heydenthum gezeigt wird: Oder die Religion der heutigen Römer, hergeleitet von der Religion ihrer heydnischen Vorfahren* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1738).

<sup>24</sup> Rulant, a jurist, matriculated in Leipzig in 1686, and was in all likelihood well acquainted with the milieu which produced the early disputations considered here. For Rulant, see *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie* (Leipzig, 1875–1912), s.v.

<sup>25</sup> Middleton, *Schreiben aus Rom*, A4<sup>v</sup>–B1<sup>v</sup>. Twenty years after *A Letter from Rome*, Middleton wrote a treatise questioning postbiblical Christian miracles, *Free Enquiry into the miraculous Powers which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church from the earliest Ages* (London, 1749). Though ostensibly purporting to single out genuine (biblical) miracles from later pretences, the implied argument of this treatise is that such caustic critique could be levelled against biblical miracles as well. It was upon reading Middleton's *Free Enquiry* that the young Gibbon converted to Catholicism. See Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (Harmondsworth, 2000), 123–24. esp. 124 n. 136. I am not as yet acquainted with any German academic response to Middleton's later work.

and *Papist Icons* (1700).<sup>26</sup> Comprising of a critical and a historical section, this disputation scrutinizes the concepts of superstition and idolatry, much along Vossian lines, and then offers a detailed historical-philological arsenal of examples in an attempt to demonstrate the pagan nature of Catholicism. A similar line of argument was repeated by Flemig five years later in his *Academic Disquisition on the Speech of Icons*.<sup>27</sup> The mere notion of icons (*imagines*) shedding tears or being able to commit speech acts is for Flemig ridiculous and a sign of a pagan or Catholic idolatrous mindset. And yet, despite the combatant anti-Catholic tone, Flemig and his contemporary Lutheran disputants could not indulge in Middleton's confident triumphalism. For professors in Leipzig and Wittenberg, two traditional bastions of Lutheran orthodoxy, the confessional outlook was bleak. Their territorial overlord, the Wettin Elector of Saxony Friedrich August I (1670–1733), had converted to Catholicism in 1697 in order to obtain the Polish–Lithuanian crown as August II.<sup>28</sup> To add to this, a new note of caution, betrayed in a distinction Flemig makes in the *Academic Disquisition*, is revealing:

One must distinguish between true, actual speech (*vera, propria loquela*) which can only be attributed to man, and apparent, analogical speech (*apparens analogica loquela*), (others will call it a semblance of speech) which is often barely distinguishable by its external expression of sound from human speech, for, if you consider this in light of the definition I have put forth above you will see they differ from each other completely. Who is, therefore, ignorant of the fact that the former cannot be attributed to icons? Yet, if indeed one was to dismiss this speech of icons to the most part as nothing but old wives' tales and miracles, we would not be greatly opposed as long as he does not dismiss them all en masse as mere tales, and does not use the term miracle in such a lax sense, for we shall hear the miraculous speech of icons [in this disputation] uttered by the exertions of either the Devil or of men.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Meletema de sudore imaginum tam gentilium, quam pontificiorum* (Leipzig, 1700).

<sup>27</sup> *Disquisitio academica de loquela imaginum* (Leipzig, 1705).

<sup>28</sup> Known also as August the Strong.

<sup>29</sup> *Disquisitio academica*, 5–6: "...distinguendum est inter loquelam veram, propriam solique homini attribuendam, & inter loquelam apparentem & analogicam, (alii simulacrum loquelaee dicent) quae externa quidem soni articulatione parum saepe loquela hominis differt; quodsi tamen ad definitionem paulo ante allatam examinas, multis parasangis ab invicem omnino differt, hanc vero, non illam imaginibus posse concedi, quis ignorat? Sin vero nihilo secius & hanc imaginum loquelam vel pro anilibus fabulis, vel miraculis maximam partem venditare quis persistat, non multum ei repugnabimus, si modo ad unum omnes meras fuisse fabullas non existimet, miraculorumque vocem in paulo laxiori sumat



While Flemig decries what he sees as Catholic superstition, a new and radically different peril has presented itself. One of the great challenges posed to Christian orthodoxy in all confessions by the end of the seventeenth century was the complete and systematic negation of miracles, and more dangerously, of divine Providence, most famously by Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677) and Balthasar Bekker (1634–1698) in his *De betoverde Wereld* (*The World Bewitched*) (1691).<sup>30</sup> Although, to the best of my knowledge, the theme of pagan gods was usually invoked in this period to confront the opposing dangers of superstition and atheism, there are some instances of ancient paganism being used to ward off other radical foes of orthodoxy. One such example is the Leipzig *Historical-Philological-Moral Dissertation concerning the Affection of Apotheosis* (1710),<sup>31</sup> presided over by Wolfgang Christoph Wigand; where, among other arguments, the author claims that a consideration of this pagan folly is useful in refuting the infamous radical Dutch thinker Adrian Beverland (1654–1712), with his highly unorthodox theory of Original Sin and his hedonist teaching.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, Lutheran divines had to sail carefully between the Scylla of “Catholic idolatry” and the Charybdis of an outright negation of divine Providence and miracles. Proving that God had practiced his benign Providence even among the ancient pagans was thus a convenient riposte to Deists. A good example of such tactics is the *Historical Exercise concerning providential Miracles among the Ancients*,<sup>33</sup> presented on Saturday, 11 April 1714 by the Leipzig theologian and preacher Friedrich Quirin Gregorii (1687–1725). Gregorii was awarded his bachelor’s degree in theology at Leipzig in 1714, and was active as a preacher in Leipzig and its university until his early death in 1725.<sup>34</sup> The historical exercise differs from the disputation in that it was delivered rather than disputed, but its form and underlying mode of argumentation are identical to the written

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significatu, ita enim omnino miram audiemus imaginum loquealm, sive Daemonum sive hominum opera elaboratam.”

Translations from the Latin throughout the article are my own.

<sup>30</sup> The German translation (*Die bezauberte Welt*) appeared in 1693.

<sup>31</sup> *Dissertatio historico-philologico-moralis de affectione ΑΙΤΙΟΘΕΩΣΕΩΣ* (Leipzig, 1710).

<sup>32</sup> On Beverland see Jonathan I. Israel, *The Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001), 87–88. For a consideration of Beverland’s unusual career in the context of “impolite learning” within the early modern Republic of Letters, see Martin Mulsow, “Unanständigkeit. Zur Mißachtung und Verteidigung des Decorum in der Gelehrtenpolitik der Frühen Neuzeit,” *Historische Anthropologie* 8 (2000): 98–118.

<sup>33</sup> *Exercitatio historica de miraculis Providentiae apud gentes antiquas* (Leipzig, 1714).

<sup>34</sup> See Jöcher, *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1751), s.v.

disputations of the day. Gregorii's aim, the refutation of Spinoza and other "atheists," is evident; he indeed makes two explicit attempts to refute the philosopher, referring his readers to the exact place in the *Theological-Political Treatise* where the pernicious negation of miracles is argued,<sup>35</sup> as well as quoting with approval Gottfried Olearius's (1672–1715) argument against Spinoza.<sup>36</sup> The existence of miracles is for Gregorii an integral part of the proof of divine Providence's existence. The work therefore starts with a demonstration of the existence of Providence (§ I), followed by a definition of the different kinds of miracles (§ I–III), and an enumeration of divine miracles performed by Providence amongst the ancient pagans (§ IV). Once the conceptual framework has been defined, the rest of the historical exercise (§ V–XVIII) is dedicated to the examination of an arsenal of instances culled from Georgii's classical perusal. The opening demonstration is crucial for Gregorii. While the pagans (blindly) boasted of their own miracles against Christian miracle-working, they believed, nonetheless, in Providence. Theirs was a false and superstitious credulity, and yet Gregorii is here more concerned with the ancient Epicureans and latter-day "atheists" who commit the opposite crime of negating the very existence and working of Providence, as displayed in its miracles. Gregorii stresses that the very order of the created world and its maintenance are in themselves ample proof of Providence, and that recognition of this should direct the actions of man, who has been endowed with reason, to the Creator's greater glory.<sup>37</sup> Miracles, nonetheless, are an important proof of Providence's manifest interferences in human history, and Gregorii is eager to offer a detailed account of some of these instances among pagans. Proving the miraculous workings of Providence among the pagans constitutes a pivotal argument in Gregorii's intellectual battle with contemporary "atheists": if Providence was benign enough to perform these for benighted pagans, then its miraculous actions on behalf of Christians should presumably become obvious. The pagans themselves did nothing to merit these providential miracles, but they are to be found among all nations as signs of God's Providence, proclaiming His glory.<sup>38</sup>

A further example of this growing need to steer between "superstition" and "atheism," and the role that the invocation of the ancient pagans played in this effort can be found in the 1724 Altdorf address by Ferdinand

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<sup>35</sup> Gregorii, *Exercitatio historica*, 12.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



Jakob Baier (1707–1788), at the time a young student in the medical faculty who in later years was to become chairman of the Imperial Academy of Sciences and privy counselor at the court of Brandenburg-Ansbach.<sup>39</sup> Baier's speech, entitled *An Oration on Lightning*, was reprinted in 1756, by which time Baier had become a prominent scholar.<sup>40</sup> Baier charts a path between the twin perils of a pagan credulity that attributes too much ominous meaning to thunder, and a latter-day "atheism" which sees in it nothing more than a natural phenomenon. This cautious beginning is followed by a gallery of mostly pagan examples of prodigious occurrences of lightning and instances of divine punishment and reward through lightning, with some Christian instances, ancient and more recent, added. Since Baier nowhere explains by which means one is to distinguish superstitious awe from the correct identification of lightning's ominous nature, his audience may have been at loss as to how to address this important distinction. It could be the case that the oration's stress on the ominous potential of lightning, using primarily Greco-Roman examples, resulted primarily from the desire to counter contemporary skepticism, which may have seemed more menacing than "Catholic superstition" at the time of the oration's composition (1724) or of its reissue three decades later. The topic, incidentally, was poignantly relevant to Baier's Altdorf audience in 1724, since one of the buildings of the university had been devastated by lightning several years earlier.<sup>41</sup>

Given these concerns, it is not surprising that the philological examples treated in these disputations were organized according to Christian criteria as treated within the framework of Christian humanism. In other words, not only was Protestant Christianity perceived to be the only path to salvation, but it invariably constituted the explanatory framework by which to contextualize and interpret non-Christian phenomena. A good example among many is the *Dissertation explaining the [Custom of] Howling at the Rites of Minerva*, presented at the University of Wittenberg by a certain Benjamin Hoffmann on 15 June 1719,<sup>42</sup> and presided over (and probably composed) by Friedrich Strunz (1680–1725), professor of poetry and dean of the lower faculty.<sup>43</sup> In the first section the Latin verb

<sup>39</sup> Johann Georg Meusel, *Lexikon der vom Jahr 1750 bis 1800 verstorbenen teutschen Schriftsteller*, s.v.

<sup>40</sup> *Oratio de fulminibus literatorum ordini fatalibus* (Altdorf, 1756).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–19.

<sup>42</sup> *Ululatum in sacris Minervae praeside Friderico Strunzio...dissertatione publica exponit et illustrat M. Beniamin Hoffmann Vratislaviensis* (Wittenberg, 1719).

<sup>43</sup> On Strunz see *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*, s.v.

*ululare* (to howl) is twinned with the Greek ὀλοῦν Strunz considers several instances of ὀλοῦν in ancient Greek literature (mostly Homer and Greek tragedies) and argues for the use of this verb to describe the common practice of female worshipers in both public and private rites of Minerva.<sup>44</sup> Significantly, Strunz also suggests that the Latin *ululare* is derived from the Hebrew לַיֵּלֶל (*leyalel*). This is no ostentatious display of a command of the three ancient languages, but a clear mark that the cult of Minerva is treated here within the framework of Christian Humanism. Strunz offers at the outset three possible etymologies for Minerva.<sup>45</sup> Among them, following Vossius's *De theologia gentili*, is the identification of Naamah, mentioned in Genesis 4:22, as the source for the pagan goddess—this is also the explanation Strunz tentatively prefers. The actual reference to an obscure Old Testament figure is significant insofar as it betrays the typical assumption that pagan deities are misunderstood renderings of Old Testament figures, and are thus derivative in nature.

The derivative nature of Greco-Roman figures and myths is further articulated in a disputation presided over by Strunz five years later (20 December 1724), and presented by a certain Johann David Matthaeus. Entitled *Nisus symbolizing Samson* it puts forward the theory that the mythological Trojan hero Nisus, known from Virgil's *Aeneid*, is a symbolic transformation of the Old Testament Samson.<sup>46</sup> This Old Testament derivation of a pagan mythological figure is articulated by arguing that the two names derive via parallel etymology, which to Strunz proves that both names mean the same;<sup>47</sup> that their parents' names are strikingly similar;<sup>48</sup> that the two heroes possessed a common dignity;<sup>49</sup> that they were contemporaries;<sup>50</sup> that each man's prowess was symbolized in his long hair;<sup>51</sup> and so on. The succession of parallels is crowned by the fact

<sup>44</sup> Strunz, *Ululatus in sacris Minervae*, 13–15.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1–2: "Sive enim eam pro Naëma, Tubalcaini sorore, ac Lamech filia, cum *Vossio* lib. I de Idolol. cap. XVII pag. 129, sive pro providentia et scientia, cum *Phurnuto*, de Natura Deorum pag. 184 in Opusc. Myth. Thomae Gale, aliisque, sive cum celeberrimo *Hardtio* pro Atheniensium republica, lib. I. de Pygmaeis cap. II pag. 43 et 44 habeamus, reperiemus ubiuis, quod mentes exerceat, instruat ac confirmet. Etenim, si fides Iudaeorum magistris habenda est, duxit Naemam Noachus uxorem, dignamque Deus habuit, ex qua genus humanum, magna ista eluione deletum, restauraret. *Iarchius* ad Genes. IV ex Bereschit Rabba. Quis autem matris humani generis historia consideratu dignius esset?"

<sup>46</sup> *Quod bene vortat Nisum Samsonis symbolicum* (Wittenberg, 1724).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–7.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

that both heroes took their own lives—Samson by toppling the Philistine temple and Nisus by a hopeless onslaught against the slayers of his beloved Euryalus.<sup>52</sup> This parallel, as the summary makes clear, is neither morally nor theologically neutral:

Hence observe the deception of the enemy of mankind, who has led not one but innumerable peoples, by the abuse of Samson's example, to the crime of suicide; just as among many nations, and the Phoenicians in particular, the abominable practice of human sacrifice was observed, following the sacrifice of Isaac.<sup>53</sup>

In other words, the derivative nature of the pagan hero denotes not only an inferior nature, but also the deceiving wiles of no less an adversary than the devil himself, intent as ever on corrupting mankind. It is worth noting that an orthodox indictment of the devil had been poignantly relevant since the late seventeenth century, with the rise of radical thinkers such as Balthasar Bekker and the Mennonite preacher Anton van Dale (1638–1708); the latter's dismissal of the devil's role in world history had been the subject of several adamant refutations by Lutheran theologians, among them the Leipzig theologian Georg Möbius (1616–1697), in his detailed exposition of 1685, the *Philological-Theological Treatise on the Origin, Propagation, and Duration of Pagan Oracles*.<sup>54</sup> Möbius's *Treatise* was published together with three of his philological-theological disputations, among them one on the pagan atrocity of human sacrifice—that same ἀνθρωποθυσία that would be echoed in Strunz's disputation four decades later. The theme of human sacrifice and the symbolic significance of Isaac's story had concerned Strunz three years earlier, in his 1721 *Problema Mythologicum: A mythological conundrum: whether or not the sacrifice of Phrixus is the same as Isaac's*.<sup>55</sup> Phrixus and his twin sister Helle,

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 22: "Generis humani hostis fraudem inde obserues, qui, uti immolatione Isaaci, quam apud gentes plurimas, Phoenices praesertim, execranda ἀνθρωποθυσία secuta est, Samsonis quoque abusus exemplo, non unum, sed innumerabiles ad αὐτοχειρίας scelus adduxit."

<sup>54</sup> Georg Möbius, *Tractatus philologico-theologicus de oraculorum ethnicorum origine, propagatione, et duratione* (Leipzig, 1685). For Anton van Dale's work on the ancient oracles and the ensuing controversy see Meindert Evers, "Die 'Orakel' von Antonius van Dale (1638–1708): Eine Streitschrift," *Lias* 8 (1981): 225–67. For the broader context and implication of the controversy surrounding van Dale's work see Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 375–405.

<sup>55</sup> *Problema mythologicum: utrum immolatio Phixi eadem sit ac Isaaci nec ne?* (Wittenberg, 1721).

whom Strunz's students would have known from Ovid's *Fasti*,<sup>56</sup> as well as from the Argonaut epics by Apollonius of Rhodes and Valerius Flaccus, were the children of the Boeotian king Athamas and the cloud goddess Nephele. Their hateful stepmother Ino, who conspired to have them killed, roasted the crop seeds in the kingdom and when these, in consequence, failed to grow and a famine was looming, she bribed the Boeotian delegation sent to the oracle to falsely report that the only way to appease the gods and avoid famine would be the sacrifice of Phrixus and Helle. Just as the two were about to be sacrificed, their godly mother sent a golden-fleeced flying ram to their rescue. On their way Helle fell and drowned in the waters of the Dardanelles—hence called the Hellespontus ("Helle's sea"). Her more fortunate brother eventually reached Colchis, where he sacrificed the wondrous ram which then became the background of the legend of the Argonauts' quest for the Golden Fleece.

That Strunz sees this story as the product of pagan idolatry and poetic fiction is hardly surprising. Significant, though, is his insistence that behind the pagan superstition lies a fundamental Christian truth, waiting to be excavated by the discerning scholar.<sup>57</sup> The choice of such a theme for a disputation seems, however, to have required a certain apologetic effort.<sup>58</sup> The obvious parallels between the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac and the unhappy Boeotian royal family are elaborated, namely the intended sacrifice of a child, his (and in the Boeotian case their) delivery by divine intervention, and the appearance of a substitute sacrifice. The parallels between the biblical and pagan stories lead Strunz to suggest that the pagan bards had distorted the true story told in Scripture into their absurd fable—and yet the pagan absurdity had a clear Christian truth at its core. An interesting excursus is offered here by a consideration of the Quran. Though Strunz has no kind words for the Quran's version of Abraham's intended sacrifice (of Ismail/Ishmael rather than Isaac), he nonetheless deals with it at length and actually quotes the Quran (Sura 37,

<sup>56</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, iii 849–76; vi 55–58.

<sup>57</sup> Strunz, *Problema mythologicum*, A2<sup>v</sup>–A3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 8: "Simile & mihi nunc institutum est: *quando ad uindicandam docendi legendique facultatem, leges academicae dissertationem conscribendam praecipunt*. Placuit ex multis eiusmodi thema illi constituere, quod & gratum simul foret, & utile. Incidi igitur in hanc de immolatione Phixi fabulam, quae ob maximam rerum eam circumstantium, convenientiam, non incogruè ad immolationem Isaaci applicari posse, mihi uidebatur; de quo quidem nemo adhuc eorum omnium, quos inspicere licuit, auctorum, cogitavit: licet me non fugiat, quod nonnulli immolationem *Iphigeniae* huc referant. . . . Decreui proinde, ne quid dissimulasse uidear, problematis illius: *utrum immolatio Phixi eadem sit ac Isaaci, nec ne?* rationibus maxime probabilibus motus, aientem tueri."

108), along with the influential commentary, the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* (*Commentary of the two Jalals*) composed by Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli (d. 1459) and his pupil Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505). The use of this quote, sure enough, is polemical, and Strunz scornfully rejects the Quran's version of the biblical story; yet the Arabic quotation (followed by Latin translation) of a Quranic verse<sup>59</sup> and a prominent Islamic commentary is in itself a sign of the ever-broadening textual horizons of university scholars in the early eighteenth century.

A different, rather less pejorative, argument for pagan derivations from monotheistic sources comes from the Altdorf professor of philosophy, rhetoric, and poetics, Magnus Daniel Omeis (1648–1708). On 6 May 1700, a certain Martin Götz defended the thesis put forward in the disputation composed and presided over by Omeis, *On the accustomed Acts of Expiation among the Ancients*.<sup>60</sup> As with other works of its kind, Omeis's argument opens with a detailed consideration of the etymology of *expiatio* and its ancient Greek equivalents. Having established the etymological groundwork, Omeis states the historical and theological argument underlying his modest philological edifice:

[We] describe what we understand by *expiations of pagans* to be actions and religious ceremonies, established by pagans, instigated by the Devil's malignant zeal (*κακοζήλια*),<sup>61</sup> and carried out by and involving certain people, objects, and rites, and by which they attempted to purge themselves of transgressions (*peccata*), to avoid misfortune and to placate the gods (*numina*).<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Strunz is quoting from Ludovico Marracci's 1698 edition and translation of the Quran.

<sup>60</sup> *Dissertatio academica de expiationibus apud ueteres gentiles usitatis* (Altdorf, 1700).

<sup>61</sup> The Greek term *κακοζήλια* (*kakozēlia*) literally means "bad zeal." Its significance, however, involves its use from antiquity as a stylistic/rhetorical term. This innocuous term was gradually moralized and theologized in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the later seventeenth century it is used repeatedly by Lutheran scholars to describe the devil's malignant aping of divine miracles and institutions in a pernicious attempt to lead mankind astray. For a study of the term's career in Roman literary criticism, see Harry D. Jocelyn, "Vergilius cacozelus (Donatus Vita Vergilii 44)," *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* 2 (1979): 67–142. For a preliminary consideration of Melancthon's use of the term in the sixteenth century see Asaph Ben-Tov, *Lutheran Humanists and Greek Antiquity: Melancthonian Scholarship between Universal History and Pedagogy* (Leiden, 2009), 38.

<sup>62</sup> Omeis, *Dissertatio academica de expiationibus*, 4–5: "Et ut uno quasi obtutu conspici possit, quid nos per *Expiationis gentilium* intelligamus, eas describimus, quod sint actiones & ceremoniae religiosae, instigante Diaboli [5] *κακοζήλια* a gentibus institutae, & certis personis rebus, ritibusque adhibitae peractae, quibus se a peccatis purgare, mala avertere, ac Numina placare conabantur."

This is followed by a detailed argument deriving pagan forms of atonement from Israelite practices, which were corrupted by the devil to the bane of credulous pagans. The dissertation's philological section, which enumerates instances of expiation found in Greek and Roman literature, reveals a broad and careful reading of the Classics—but the important point here is that these instances are, as it were, deduced from the Protestant criteria laid out at the outset, and interpreted within a Christian framework. It is, in the present context, not so much the disparaging evaluation of pagan rites of expiation which is significant, as important as this may have been for Omeis, but the underlying assumption that pagan phenomena are, diachronically considered, genealogically derived from Israelite (that is, for Omeis, Christian) sources; and that they are also, even from a synchronic perspective, to be construed along the lines of Christian (i.e., Protestant) criteria. Pagan phenomena are (deprived) denizens of a Christian cosmos. That this denigration was in no way restricted to Greco-Roman antiquity is illustrated, e.g., in a 1719 *Paradoxical disputation on Isis* by the Reformed theologian and Hebraist Heinrich Jakob van Bashuysen (1679–1750).<sup>63</sup> Using a paragraph from Suetonius's *Life of Otho* as a case in point Bashuysen goes a step further than his aforementioned contemporaries: not only are pagan deities traceable to monotheistic sources, polytheism is in fact a misunderstanding of the Trinity. Strikingly, all polytheistic clusters of gods, when considered properly, can be “translated” back to the elements of the Trinity they faultily represent. In the case of Isis this is achieved when she is considered together with her divine spouse Osiris and their son Horus. This Egyptian “Trinity” is then matched by Bashuysen with its Greco-Roman equivalents, i.e., Demeter, Apollo, and Bacchus.<sup>64</sup> This may have been taking things a step too far for some Lutheran theologians; but it is certainly not an illogical step to take, and is wholly within the mental framework considered thus far.

An instructive instance of a university disputation taking a completely different view of pagan worship is offered by Johann August Bach (1721–1758) in his *Disputation in Defense of the Eleusinian Mysteries* (1745).<sup>65</sup> This is one of Bach's first works, delivered and published in the year he attained his master's degree from Leipzig's philosophy faculty, and five years before he attained his doctorate in the law faculty of the same university, where

<sup>63</sup> *Disputatio paradoxa de Iside, Magna Dearum Matre, ad locum Suet. In Othone, C.XII.§.5* (Zerbst, 1719).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, A4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> *Pro Mysteriis Eleusiniis disputatio* (Leipzig, 1745).

he served as professor (*extraordinarius*) of legal history between 1752 and his untimely death. To the extent that he is still mentioned in modern scholarship it is usually due to his history of Roman law (1754) and as part of the philological-historical “scene” in mid-century Leipzig. A student of the Classical scholar Johann Friedrich Christ (1701–1756), Bach was one of Christian Gottlob Heyne’s (1729–1812) teachers in Leipzig, whom the great scholar was to recall with gratitude.<sup>66</sup> Though a legal historian by profession, and a philologist (Bach edited Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* in 1749) as well as a Neo-Latin poet,<sup>67</sup> rather than a theologian, it is worth noting that from 1753 Bach served as assessor on the Leipzig Consistory.<sup>68</sup> While Bach’s disputation conforms to the formal structure of the genre, it is far removed in method and content from the aforementioned disputations.

The Eleusinian Mysteries, the elitist mystery cult popular in Athens in antiquity, had been subjected to Christian polemics from the time of the early Church fathers. Bach’s disputation is a defense of the mystery cult as an honest and morally upright form of religious worship, and his argumentation is an instructive case of a radically different approach to antiquity. The disputation’s audience in Leipzig may have been struck by Bach’s determined defense of the probity of a pagan practice and outright (though civil) dismissal of revered patristic opinion—Augustine first and foremost. In the present context, however, it is not the fact that Bach treats an antique religious phenomenon with sympathy and respect, or even that he greatly values aspects of Greco-Roman religious practice, that is decisive, but rather that he does so from outside of the tradition of Christian humanism and the accustomed manner of scrutinizing such phenomena within a university disputation. The first thing to strike the reader is Bach’s lack of concern for etymologies, definitions, or the categorical divisions and subdivisions of religious phenomena; nor is he concerned with the rebuttal of “Papism” or “atheism.” The first point is

<sup>66</sup> Marianne Heidenreich, *Christian Gottlob Heyne und die Alte Geschichte* (Munich and Leipzig, 2006), 46–50.

<sup>67</sup> A slim volume of his Neo-Latin and Greek poetry was published three decades after his death by the Leipzig law professor August Cornelius Stockmann, *Ioannis Augusti Bachii Jcti quondam Lipsiensis Carmina* (Dresden and Leipzig, 1787). The volume is prefaced by a short biography.

<sup>68</sup> See *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*, s.v. and *Neue deutsche Biographie* (Berlin, 1953–), s.v. Bach is also awarded a short laudatory mention in Conrad Bursian, *Geschichte der klassischen Philologie in Deutschland von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich and Leipzig, 1883), 1:406–7; Meusel, *Lexikon der vom Jahr 1750 bis 1800*, s.v.; Theophilus Christoph Harlesius, *De vitis philologorum nostra aetate clarissimorum* (Bremen, 1764), 1: 73–82—a near contemporary source impressed by Bach’s pro Eleusinian disputation (75).



intimately linked to a further striking characteristic of this disputation: while Bach does not state this in so many words, and while, as with traditional disputations, the aim of the disputation is given at the outset, Bach proceeds by drawing inferences from the detailed philological instances he lays out, rather than deducing ancient examples, as it were, from a set of principles laid out at the outset, as we have seen with earlier examples. This is, at least ostensibly, a case of inductive argumentation, in contrast to the deductive method and structure of the works considered so far. This leads Bach to admit the relative nature of his argumentation, as opposed to the closed certainty customarily assumed in disputations. Note, for instance, the sixth section of the disputation, entitled *Defensio a temporis ratione ducta* (*A defense drawn from a consideration of the times*),<sup>69</sup> where the argument is admittedly one of probability rather than certainty: “We argue . . . by reasons inferred from the condition of the period in which the Eleusinian Mysteries were founded, that it is *improbable*<sup>70</sup> that they would have involved acts of fraud or that they could have been upheld by means of dishonesty.”<sup>71</sup> Another indication of Bach’s approach is his repeated reliance on accumulative evidence to answer patristic allegations against the Mysteries, rather than arguing for the logical or conceptual untenability of the opposed position—an argument traditionally based on a careful definition of the pivotal concepts at hand. One example is the case made for the *probable* probity of the Eleusinian Mysteries, based on the fact that among its initiates and admirers were many who were recognized to have been morally upright men. They were *unlikely* to partake in a morally offensive cult.<sup>72</sup>

This mode of argumentation suits Bach’s historical view of ancient paganism. It is not a derivation of monotheistic, Christian teaching, but a phenomenon with an independent history, and with contingent local circumstances to account for its emergence. Thus the Eleusinian mystery cult of Demeter was, according to Bach, founded by the Athenian king Erechtheus after the *polis* had been delivered from hunger, as an annual thanksgiving to commemorate this great boon. The deliverance from famine was itself no miracle but an import of fruit. The mythological arrival

<sup>69</sup> Bach, *Pro Eleusiniis Mysteriis*, 6.

<sup>70</sup> My italics.

<sup>71</sup> *Pro Eleusiniis Mysteriis*, 6: “Defendimus potius primo loco, probabile non esse per rationes, ex conditione temporis eius ductas, quo instituta sunt Mysteria, fraudes in iis intercessisse, aut improbitate sustineri potuisse.”

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., §3. *Defensio ab exemplis*, 5–6.



of Demeter is therefore to be understood metaphorically.<sup>73</sup> Whether or not Bach got his Athenian history right is beside the point. What is significant about this university disputation, delivered at what was in the late seventeenth century a bastion of Lutheran orthodoxy, is the shift to historical philology—though the title *philologico-historica* had been used before; which leads Bach to put forward the Eleusinian Mysteries as a religious phenomenon independent of Judaeo-Christian precedents and of diabolic wiles. Like other scholars before him, Bach is aware of similarities between certain pagan and Christian practices. And yet, unlike earlier Protestant scholars, who identified these similarities as empty shells of originally Christian (Noachite) practices among the unenlightened pagans, Bach provocatively suggests that early Christians borrowed from pagan sources.<sup>74</sup> Though I am not aware of anything in Bach's life or career to suggest that he took a radically relativist view of Christianity, or that there was something otherwise markedly nonconformist in his religious outlooks and practice (and, as stated above, he did serve on the Leipzig Consistory), such a view of pagan religion would have struck his earlier Leipzig predecessors as outrageous. Bach, it will be remembered, was later to become a law rather than a theology professor, and to some extent his arguments may have been informed by the mode of legal argumentation, rather than seventeenth-century Lutheran metaphysics. This disputation, in an oblique way, also confirms the role the Leipzig law faculty played in the first half of the eighteenth century in introducing new ideas, which we identify as part of the Enlightenment.<sup>75</sup>

Though the old form of argumentation did not vanish in 1745, the evidence I have studied thus far suggests a gradual shift in university attitudes toward paganism, starting roughly in the 1740s. A year after Bach's attainment of the legal doctor's degree in Leipzig, a disputation by the young Georg Gottlieb Börner (1734–1804), *Disputation on the Saturnalian Festivities* (1751)<sup>76</sup> was delivered in the lower faculty of the same university. Though dull in comparison to Bach's disputation, it offers a nonapologetic account of the Roman worship of Saturn, concerned with a philological

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 7–8: "Equidem non dubito, quin ea de causa inducta fuerint, vt, cum, importatis frugibus, ciuitas ex magna fame liberata esset, (quod sine dubio in fabulis, Cereris aduentu inuolutum, significatur,) eius beneficii memoria quotannis celebraretur, renouareturque, grates Deo persoluerentur."

<sup>74</sup> *Pro Eleusiniis Mysteriis*, 9.

<sup>75</sup> See Notkar Hammerstein, "Die Universität Leipzig im Zeichen der frühen Aufklärung," in *Leipzig. Aufklärung und Bürgerlichkeit* (ed. W. Martens; Heidelberg, 1990), 125–40.

<sup>76</sup> *De Saturnalibus* (Leipzig, 1751).

amassing of historical information rather than with the arrangement of philological material according to Protestant criteria. At the very outset Börner describes the disputation's aim as that of offering a more elaborate discussion of the origin and nature of the Saturnalia. The motivation to write about the Saturnalia, which to Börner must have seemed like a mysterious and ecstatic rite, was provided by a learned desideratum. The Saturnalia, according to him, had not hitherto been sufficiently studied, with some notable exceptions which he intends to outdo.<sup>77</sup> While Bach's argument sounds excitingly modern, Börner's sounds depressingly so.

A later eighteenth-century disputation leads us back to an orthodox Lutheran theologian, Johann Karl Volborth (1748–1796). *The Inaugurational philological Disputation concerning Mt. Olympus of Thessaly, the Abode of the Gods*<sup>78</sup> was presented by Volborth on his return to Göttingen to obtain his master's degree in the lower faculty in 1776. The following year witnessed his appointment in the theological faculty, where he was later to become a professor *extraordinarius*; he ended up as superintendent in Gifhorn.<sup>79</sup> Since the disputation's lengthy title<sup>80</sup> states that it was presented *sine praeside* (without an officiating *praeses*) we can be fairly certain that it was composed by Volborth himself. Instead of the earlier customary division of such disputations into theological-philosophical and then philological sections—i.e., conceptual considerations followed by philological instances confirming the criteria established in the first part—Volborth's detailed disputation is divided into geographical and mythological sections. The former establishes the geographical location of Mt. Olympus. The latter, mythological part is in no way concerned with monotheistic sources and their pagan corruption, but rather amasses philological evidence for the ancient poets' portrayals of Mt Olympus as the abode of the Olympian gods. Volborth does pose some questions; e.g., asking the reasons why this otherwise ordinary mountain should have become the Olympians' habitat. Though arguably smacking of learned

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>78</sup> *Disputatio inauguralis philologica De Olympo Thessaliae Monte Deorum sede* (Göttingen, 1776).

<sup>79</sup> See *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*, s.v.

<sup>80</sup> The full title boasts, among other things, the gracious permission for the inaugural disputation granted by the university's chancellor—no other than the Hanoverian Elector and King of England George III. It is less than likely that George III would have taken an interest in Volborth's tedious and lengthy scrutiny of appearances of Mt. Olympus in Greek and Roman sources.

dullness, and lacking the brilliance of the compositions of his older Göttingen contemporary Heyne, Volborth's inaugural disputation is nonetheless a consideration of ancient myth in its own right and on its own terms. Olympus has been freed of contemporary theological strife. Reading Volborth's tedious work, set within the formal confines of a university disputation, it is easy to forget that it was composed twenty-one years after Winckelmann's *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauer-Kunst* (*Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*), a decade after Lessing's masterful *Laokoon*, and seven years after his *Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet* (*How the Ancients portrayed Death*). And though it clearly cannot compete with these works of genius, it is nonetheless an instructive case, the formal conservatism notwithstanding, of academic responsiveness to the epochal changes from without the university tradition.

As we progress through the second half of the eighteenth century, the traditional Latin disputations become rarer. And yet despite the risks inherent in great chronological leaps, I would like to conclude this preliminary sketch with a late—and German, rather than Latin—example. Still within the framework of an academic treatment of paganism, we move finally to the Lutheran theologian and orientalist of Erfurt, Johann Joachim Bellermann (1754–1842). Bellermann's long career extends from his young student days in Erfurt to Göttingen, where he studied with Heyne and the famous biblical scholar and orientalist, Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791) among others; to Russia where he served as a court tutor; and then back to his native Erfurt, where he was appointed theology professor in a gymnasium, as well as being offered a professorship in Erfurt's theological faculty. He ended his long life in Berlin, teaching at its university and directing one of its gymnasia until shortly before his death. This geographical diversity was matched by his varied fields of interest, as Lutheran theologian, Classical philologist, orientalist, and musical pedagogue. Bellermann also evinced an interest in the natural sciences and their instruction in the gymnasia. In 1793, he published a short treatise in German on the ancient custom of anointing rocks: *Ueber die alte Sitte Steine zu salben und deren Ursprung* (*Concerning the ancient custom of anointing rocks and its origin*). This is a version of a lecture Bellermann had presented to the Electoral Academy of Sciences in Erfurt in 1791, the year before his appointment as the Academy's permanent secretary. The treatise follows the traditional form of university dissertations. Its aim is to explain the rationality behind the seemingly absurd ancient practice of anointing rocks, as Bellermann explains:

Some obsolete customs, and the curious assumptions which underlie them, often lose their peculiarity and curiosity when one traces the constitutive elements which reunite these ostensible anomalies with reason (*Vernunft*) through the unfolding of the first emergence and gradual development of these elements. Therewith will the conundrum be transformed into plain speech and the peculiar to a normal phenomenon.<sup>81</sup>

While Old Testament, Greek, and Germanic examples are cited, this is not done as a means to establishing a pedigree, nor of refuting paganism as a fallen form of pristine Christianity. They are given as historically contingent forms of religious worship suited to human capacities at any given moment. Even the Old Testament patriarchs are not exempt from historical relativism, and while Jacob's intentions in anointing rocks in Genesis 28 were laudable, Bellermann dismisses patristic attempts at christological interpretation.<sup>82</sup> The apparent "sin" of pagan (and even biblical) practices is neither superstition nor idolatry but a misleading semblance of irrationality (*Unvernunft*), which the discerning reader can account for as a rational approach suited to earlier, less advanced stages of human existence. Though the treatise was the work of an orthodox Lutheran steeped in traditional university scholarship, one can assume that had Lessing lived long enough after publishing his *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (*The Education of the Human Race*, 1780), he would have found in Bellermann, in stark contrast to the imaginary Damis of his youthful days, an adversary worth disputing.

To conclude by stating the obvious, this preliminary sketch has touched upon just a fraction of the existing corpus of early modern disputations—though, I would argue, a representative fraction. More importantly, like any other historical phenomenon, the shifts in the understanding of pagan gods and ancient religious practices have more than one context within which they can be rewardingly construed. New debates were emerging on facets of antiquity, Greco-Roman and other, and new battle lines were being drawn and fiercely assailed, most famously the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, which found its resonance in German

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<sup>81</sup> Johann Joachim Bellermann, *Ueber die alte Sitte Steine zu salben und deren Ursprung* (Erfurt 1793), 4: "Einzelne ausgehobene Sitten und die ihnen zum grund liegenden sonderbaren Vorstellungen verlieren meist das Auffallende und Sonderbare, wenn man durch die Entwicklung ihres ersten Entstehens und des allmählichen Ausbilden die Mitglieder aufsucht, die diese scheinbaren Anomalien mit der Vernunft wieder in Verbindung setzen. Dadurch wird das Räthsel zur planen Rede, und das Seltsame zur gewöhnlichen Erscheinung."

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–7.

universities decades before Winckelmann and Herder.<sup>83</sup> Several fascinating strands of thought concerning the ancient world evolved in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries without, to the best of my knowledge, assuming a central role in German academia's busy traffic of disputations and dissertations.<sup>84</sup> The perspective offered here, I wish to argue, though neither comprehensive nor exclusive, points to a significant tectonic shift in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This survey is, in a sense, a modest test case for the epochal decline of Christian humanism.<sup>85</sup> For all its blind spots, academic culture and its phenomenal outpouring of printed disputations and dissertations in the German territories offer a fine seismograph with which to trace these changes—epochal in retrospect, but occurring within a punctilious exercise of discretion and erudition, proceeding in most cases with measured footnoted steps.

Bellermann himself, as well as the earlier academic scholars mentioned above, witnessed a remarkable transformation of classical scholarship and the rise of new approaches to antiquity. To this could be added the famous contemporary developments in biblical criticism and debates on the relation between philosophy and theology. The masterpieces those debates produced attract nowadays more attention than what seem like staid scholastic deliberations in cumbersome Latin. These latter were, however, a significant part of their contemporary intellectual landscape, especially of the seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries, and present us with the strikingly long endurance of an old fashioned scholarly mode of argument in the Holy Roman Empire on the one hand, but also a surprising alertness to change on the other, and an eventual reception of new wine into very old jugs.

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<sup>83</sup> See, e.g., the caustic attack mounted by the Helmstedt professor of metaphysics (and later theology), Cornelius Dietrich Koch (1676–1724), on Charles Perrault, *Comparatio philosophiae primae praeae et novellae* (Helmstedt, 1719). See also Peter Kapitzka, *Ein bürgerlicher Krieg in der gelehrten Welt: zur Geschichte der Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes in Deutschland* (Munich, 1981).

<sup>84</sup> One such example is offered by reconsiderations of the Hermetic Corpus in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in light of contemporary views of Egyptian culture. See Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>85</sup> See Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann's evocative argument for the decline of the "Ciceronian sciences": "New Structures of Knowledge," in *A History of the University in Europe. Vol. II. Universities in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800)* (ed. H. de Ridder-Symoens; Cambridge, 1996), 489–530, esp. 524–7.



## PART FOUR

### ENLIGHTENMENT AND COUNTER-ENLIGHTENMENT





BETWEEN REPRESENTATION AND IMPERSONATION:  
ROUSSEAU ON THEATRE AND POLITICS

David Heyd

*The Paradox of Representation*

Representation is a dyadic relation. It consists of two relata, one standing for the other. Some argue that it is a triadic relation, adding that representation is always restricted to a particular set of properties or aspects in the two related concepts or items. Thus,  $x$  can represent  $y$  in, for instance, form or diplomatic interests, but not in other matters. If that is the case, nothing can represent another thing *tout court*, or without qualification. But the nature of these qualifications or constraints on the relation of representation is of crucial importance in both aesthetics and politics. Roughly speaking, the fewer the constraints on the relation of representation, the more controversial (or according to Rousseau's view, "dangerous" and deceptive) it becomes.

There is something paradoxical in the relation of representation. On the one hand it is a relation of identity: the represented and the representative are the same, the represented being only *re*-presented. On the other hand, the two cannot be identical, since only by being different can the representative stand for the represented (for example, by knowing more about a particular set of interests of the other party in the case of politics; or by expressing in a more effective manner certain character traits of a particular human being in the case of art). In that respect, there is something strange in the notion of an entity representing itself. Thus, representation consists of being and not being another thing at the same time.

This fundamental tension in the concept of representation goes deeper than its manifestations in theatre and politics. As is well known, the concept of *person* is rooted in the Latin term *persona*, which is the analogue of the Greek *prosopon*. It means both the mask (through which the voice of the actor is heard on the Greek stage) and the face of an individual (which is considered the focus of expression of a human being). While a mask is a representation of a figure other than that of the individual wearing it, the face is not a representation of a human being; it is identical with it, or at least a constitutive part of it. But even the face is partly alienated from

the inner self and plays a masking role in the way the self is presented to others. Thus, expressions such as “make a face” or “save face” allude to the difficulty in distinguishing between what an individual “really” is and the way that individual appears (or rather is made to appear) to others, between the person’s presence and his or her representation. Thus, although a mask is a representation of someone, the individual’s *persona* is both what that person is and the way he or she is seen through it.<sup>1</sup>

Some philosophers, most prominently Plato, view this ambiguity of the asymmetrical relation of representation as an indication of its ontological and epistemological deficiency. A representation is just a faded version of the original—less real, less true, and of a lesser value. Typically in the arts, representation involves imitation, and imitation invariably falls short of what is imitated. This metaphysics of representation served as the cornerstone for Plato’s condemnation of poetry and its exclusion from the ideal republic, but it became also the origin of the long antitheatrical tradition in Western thought, of which Jean-Jacques Rousseau is arguably the most powerful spokesman.<sup>2</sup>

The fundamental difference between Plato and Rousseau in respect of their concern with representation is that the former focuses on the ontological and epistemological shortcomings of representation while the latter is interested in the moral and political—even, we may add, existential—dangers of that basic relation. For Plato, the flaw in poetic images, especially in the theatre, is that they are not real, and engaging with them diverts the spectator from the search for knowledge. Rousseau is more worried about the moral corruption and potential political abuse involved in the pretense of claiming to represent something or someone. In Plato representation undermines objective truth; in Rousseau it obstructs the way to authenticity and moral virtue.

However, both philosophers are sensitive to the common structural paradoxical nature of representation. Despite their sharp condemnation of theatrical and political representation, they are well aware that there is no way to completely dispense with it. Not only is representation metaphysically necessary (as in Plato’s theory that the phenomenal world reflects

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew term *partzuf*, etymologically derived from the Greek *prosopon*, attests to the same ambiguity of “true face,” on the one hand, and “double face,” on the other. It denotes both the inner self and its possibly misleading appearances.

<sup>2</sup> The classic work on this tradition is Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, 1981). Chapter 9 is devoted to Rousseau. Barish’s work is at once a systematic review of the antitheatrical tradition and a defense of theatrical representation.

ideal reality): it is a *constitutive trait* of our humanity. For Rousseau, consciousness, language, art, and sociability (politics) are conceptually linked to the power to represent; representation is the price of the transition from the state of nature to a civilized mode of existence, that which we recognize as human. The tension of being and not-being oneself is inextricable from human existence, art, and politics. The aim of this paper is to examine this inescapable tension, of which Rousseau is acutely aware. It will argue that Rousseau does not, in fact, think that he can completely overcome the distance between reality and representation; and that his real project is to sift out legitimate and authentic modes of representation from the wide range of illusory and delusory simulacra.

### *Theatre as Anathema*

Rousseau's letter to Jean D'Alembert concerning the theatre is an astonishing diatribe, which reflects both his personal biases and his philosophical views. The circumstances of its formation are well documented. In 1757, D'Alembert published the entry "Geneva" in the seventh volume of the *Encyclopédie*. On the whole it expressed a very favorable, even admiring, evaluation of that city's economic and political system, as well as its morals and culture. In the last section of the article, D'Alembert offered a friendly suggestion; namely, to consider the introduction of a theatre to the city. This would make the city less dull and be an attraction to both actors and visitors from throughout Europe. Rousseau was outraged by this idea, and overreacted to it: he was personally offended by it, inflated its dangers, and turned it into an issue of conscience which could not be laid aside. In 1758, he published his lengthy response, *Lettre à M. D'Alembert sur les spectacles*,<sup>3</sup> which ignored almost all the other topics raised in D'Alembert's article. Rousseau himself testified in the preface to the *Letter* that his response was written in a melancholic atmosphere of loneliness and bitterness. Ironically, some of the paragraphs in the preface read like a dramatic text delivered by an actor on stage, trying to represent the protagonist (Rousseau), who is struggling to authentically express the struggle against the very idea of the stage and the adequacy of representation! Note, for example, the last sentence of the preface: "Reader, if you

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<sup>3</sup> All the references to this source in this article are to the widely used English translation by Allan Bloom: *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre* (Ithaca, 1968). Page references to this text are given in parentheses in the body of the text.

receive the last work with indulgence, you will be welcoming my shade, for as for me, I am no more" (7). Rousseau, the author, becomes a faded representation of his real self, which does not exist.

The historical background for Rousseau's emotionally intense response was Voltaire's decision in 1755 to establish a small theatre in his new home, not far from Geneva, to which he invited members of Geneva's upper class. Theatres were legally banned in Geneva for most of the first half of the eighteenth century, being considered unfitting for a Calvinist society and a dispensable luxury. Hence it is easy to see why the "citizen of Geneva" saw Voltaire's move as a direct threat to his beloved city, and why D'Alembert's proposal triggered a fierce counterattack (Voltaire is the real object of this attack, rather than D'Alembert, for whom Rousseau has warm words in the *Letter*). But beyond these historical circumstances, the *Letter* should be read in light of Rousseau's philosophical critique of the arts and sciences in general, beginning with his 1750 *First Discourse* (*On the Sciences and the Arts*), in which he condemns all the arts for their corrupting effect on society. This earlier tract highlights the moral and political dangers accompanying the development of arts and sciences rather than their inherent flaws as representations of reality. In that respect, the *First Discourse* is of lesser philosophical importance than the *Letter* itself (which might explain why Rousseau himself described the earlier work, in his foreword to its 1763 edition, as "at best mediocre").<sup>4</sup> But the general critical tone is fully established already in the earlier essay.

As is always the case with Rousseau, there is a sense in which his philosophy should be read in part as an expression of his biography. Thus, the passage in the *Confessions* where Rousseau describes the moment in 1749 when he first encountered the problem of the relation between arts and morals is articulated in "revelatory" terms ("The moment I had read these words I saw another universe and I became a different man").<sup>5</sup> Earlier in his biography, Rousseau's sensitivity to the tension between appearance and reality can be traced to the formative experience in early childhood of being unjustly accused of breaking a comb and his obstinate refusal to admit to this misdeed even under the threat of harsh punishment ("the [apparent] case against me was too strong and it prevailed over all

<sup>4</sup> Roger D. Masters (ed.), *The First and Second Discourses* (New York, 1964), 32.

<sup>5</sup> *Confessions* (trans. A. Scholar; New York, 2000), 341–42. Rousseau describes his intense experience as one of "agitation bordering on delirium," and retrospectively believes that it changed his whole life and explains all his later misfortunes.

my protestations").<sup>6</sup> Against the conventional rules of meting out punishment to a mischievous child, young Jean-Jacques displays what is going to be his lifelong struggle for integrity and inner truth. And one does not have to be dogmatically committed to psychoanalytical reading in order to trace the first sense of existential rift and separation to the story of Jean-Jacques' mother's death while giving birth to him, and to see this experience as the source of his never-ending effort to restore his lost integrity.<sup>7</sup>

The theatre for Rousseau is anathema in all its dictionary senses: an object of revulsion; something to be denounced and banned; and a curse. Although Rousseau admits that he personally liked the theatre and "has never willingly missed a performance of Molière" during his stay in Paris (131n.), he loathed the theatre culture—the pretense of the audience and the degenerative life led by the actors and actresses. Although he thought that in some societies, most typically the Parisian, the theatre should be allowed (and even considered as having some benefit), he firmly believed that it should be outlawed in small republics such as Geneva. Finally, the theatre is a "curse" in the sense developed in *The First Discourse*: i.e., a notable symptom of the decadence of civilization and high culture, a sign of the fall of "natural man."

Rousseau's critique of the theatre in the *Letter* is rich and variegated. On the social and political level, he is concerned with its disastrous effect on the cohesion of society and the solidarity of its members. Although the "spectacle" (the original term used by Rousseau for the theatre) is a public event, it takes place in a dark space which leaves the spectators lonely and imprisoned in their private individual experience (analogous to Plato's cave, as has been noted by all Rousseau scholars). And although the drama on stage makes the spectator feel empathy with the protagonists and identification with their suffering, these emotional responses are short-lived and superficial, and disappear once the show ends. More

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<sup>6</sup> *Confessions*, 18. This story is followed by the famous "reverse" one, in which Rousseau falsely accuses a maid of stealing a missing ribbon that he himself has coveted (82–83). The latter incident proved to be no less traumatic for Rousseau and served as one of his motives for writing the *Confessions*.

<sup>7</sup> *Confessions*, 7. Since this paper's focus is theatre and politics rather than Rousseau's (auto)biography and his desperate attempt to achieve transparency in his writing, I cannot go into his highly complex (and often cruel) self-analysis of his own (perceived) failure to reach his readers and represent himself properly. See particularly his late work, *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques*, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau: Vol. 1* (ed. R. D. Masters and C. Kelly; Hanover, NH, 1990). The three dialogues forming this book display in a most acute manner the inner rift between Rousseau's public image (*persona*) and his true self, which he believes no one understands.

disconcerting from the moral and political point of view, through the theatre the audience feels relieved of its genuine moral responsibility towards fellow citizens. The exercise of *pitié* comes cheap or even cost-free (25). The spectator is typically swept up by his emotional reactions to the fictitious events on the stage, suspending autonomous moral judgment. In Rousseau's view, contrary to the long Aristotelian tradition of appreciation for the deep cathartic effect of staged drama, the theatre does not leave any genuine and lasting mark on the human heart. Since it appeals to emotion rather than to reason, a play cannot make anyone more virtuous. Yet for political rulers, the theatre is for these very reasons a most effective tool, which allows citizens to let off steam by providing them with "bread and circuses" while creating a false sense of participation.<sup>8</sup>

Rousseau passionately argues that the theatre as an institution has a deleterious influence, promoting idleness and escapism. The indecent life style of the actors and particularly the actresses is a corrupting model for society. It undermines basic morals (*moeures*, manners), those social habits which are the backbone of a healthy society. The theatre widens social gaps and increases inequality, since it is a costly venture and requires high ticket prices. Furthermore, public funding of the institution should be avoided since the theatre is merely a luxury, and as such not only superfluous, but indeed an outright corruption of the republican virtue of austerity. Rousseau's list of the potentially harmful effects of the theatre is long, and I shall not deal with it here.<sup>9</sup> The focus of this article is on what Rousseau seems to view as the original sin of the theatre, namely, the fact that it is based on representation. Behind all the social criticism of the theatre—political and moral—lies a general condemnation of

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<sup>8</sup> Just a few years after writing the *Letter*, Rousseau shows a somewhat more conciliatory approach to the theatre. Although he still thinks that the theatre has no moral value, he recommends taking young people to the theatre in order "to study taste, not morals"; for although taste is part of "the art of being a connoisseur in matters of little importance," it contributes to our enjoyment of the (nonmoral) good things in life. See *Émile* (trans. B. Foxley; London, 1974), 309–10.

<sup>9</sup> A theme that preoccupies Rousseau but will not be discussed here is the *feminine* nature of the theatre and the threat it poses of the feminization of society and culture. This image of the theatre is associated with its seductive power, its love of ornament, the passivity of its audience, its frivolity, vanity, and its exclusive concern with love (*Letter*, 47–57). Elizabeth Wingrove makes a forceful argument that for Rousseau a major danger in the theatre is the inversion of sexual roles and the confusion of the feminine and the masculine. Wingrove, "Sexual Performance as Political Performance in the *Lettre à M. D'Alembert sur les Spectacles*," *Political Theory* 23 (1995): 587–618.

representation as the source of false appearances, insincerity, and human alienation.

### *Immediacy and Vision*

Rousseau is rightly regarded as the originator of the modern ideal of *authenticity*. Although he rarely uses the actual term, authenticity might be regarded as the highest virtue in his moral view. It applies to both the public and the private spheres and is associated with his view of human nature and the inherent threats to its integrity. From his early writings, particularly the *Second Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality*, Rousseau sketches the process of the degeneration of "Man" from a primordial utopian natural state to his present corrupt condition (putting into original use a *genealogical* method over a century before Nietzsche). Human nature is eternal, but history, the very movement of change in time, introduces into it a "split," between the true inner self and its external appearance. The process itself is irreversible, but through political and educational means, human beings can strive to mend that split. Obviously, the counterpart of the virtue of authenticity is hypocrisy, which becomes in Rousseau the chief vice of modern individuals and society: the vice of deceitful appearance governed by social convention. It is no coincidence that much of the *Letter* discusses Molière's plays.

Jean Starobinski has highlighted this fundamental obsession with authenticity in Rousseau more than other commentators and his work has served as a starting point for many Rousseau scholars in the past four decades. Starobinski describes Rousseau's conception of evil as originating in the gap between "the outer countenance" and "the heart's disposition" and labels Rousseau's challenge the "scandal of deceit." The unity of the individual is broken in childhood, as it is in the early phases of humanity's development. Starobinski refers to this break using the notion of *opacity*: we have become opaque not only to each other but, more disastrously, to our own selves.<sup>10</sup> The fundamental aim of both the individual and society is the "restoration of transparency"; according to Rousseau, this can

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<sup>10</sup> Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction* (trans. A. Goldhammer; Chicago, 1988 [1971]). See particularly *ibid.*, 3, 5, 11, 13, and 180. Starobinski sensitively notices that although Rousseau gave up personal relations with his surroundings, he nevertheless struggled to make himself transparent at least to his *readers*, using the genre of confession as his communicative tool.



be achieved either through the individual's complete withdrawal from society (as in *Émile*; or as in the solitary existence of *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*), or through political action (as in *The Social Contract*).<sup>11</sup> Mediation becomes, in Starobinski's terms, an "obstruction" which must be overcome. This mediation is most typically apparent in the relation of representation, which, as we have shown in the first section, involves in its very nature a rupture between what something is and the way it appears (is represented).

In the rest of this article I wish to examine the way the idea of transparency serves Rousseau in his critique of both the theatre and the political system, then argue that the ideal of complete transparency or authenticity is philosophically incoherent, and finally suggest that Rousseau was not only aware of the futility of the search for "immediacy" but was willing to consider legitimate forms of mediation or representation.

Transparency is an optical term, as is *spectacle* (often used by Rousseau to refer to the theatre). Transparency is the ultimate expression of immediacy in the visual sphere. However, it is typically self-defeating, in the sense that absolute transparency makes things invisible: only when light rays are "broken" do they form a spectrum of colors; and only when light is reflected by an object does the object become visible. Vision is thus physically conditioned by some form of "obstruction."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, vision is the most "intellectual" of the five senses since it perceives the most *distant* objects and in that way resembles conceptual thinking. "I see" serves as a metaphor for understanding (in contrast to "I smell danger," or "it is touching," which allude to more intuitive and less

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<sup>11</sup> There is also a parallel expression of the search for transparency in Rousseau's philosophy of religion and in his insistence on the primacy of conscience over "acquired ideas." Conscience is an innate, natural sentiment and is infallible; judgment is externally acquired and a less trustworthy guide in morality. See Rousseau's *The Creed of a Priest of Savoy* (trans. A. H. Beattie; New York, 1956), 42–44. Rousseau was skeptical of revelation because it is based on human testimony that mediates between God and the individual, involving reliance on others people's reports.

<sup>12</sup> In a tantalizing staging (in 2002) of Richard Strauss's opera, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, the late German director Herbert Wernicke portrayed the semidivine Empress, who has no shadow, (obstruction!) as belonging to a fully transparent world, invisible to anyone else and narcissistically imprisoned in self-reflection (a Rousseauesque *amour propre*). Only by descending to earthly existence and encountering the imperfect but human relationship can she rid herself of her glassy existence, obtain a shadow and overcome the curse of sterility. At the end of the performance, Wernicke dropped a semi-opaque veil on the stage which consisted of bulbs and cables, the means of his creation of the idealized staged "spectacle," thus exposing the "deceit" on which the whole production was based and suggesting that without some measure of opacity, nothing can be represented.



intellectual mental perceptions).<sup>13</sup> Vision is the most discriminatory and refined sense, and the richest in its linguistic representation. But this means also that it is typically more mediated by concepts than are experiences that come through the other senses. Although Rousseau does not discuss this hierarchy of the senses, his view implies its reversal: music is superior to painting and theatre; and dance, based on direct bodily (kinesthetic) sensation (like touch), is the most intimate expression of what we are and feel. Thus, music and dance, as we shall see, are the artistic alternatives to the representational art of the theatre.

In a way, Rousseau predicted the condition of modern society, in which visual *images* have become the mediators of human experience and social relations. His warnings concerning the harmful impact of the theatrical spectacle on citizens, in terms of anonymity, loss of solidarity, and the confusion of reality with “virtual reality” is a precursor of the contemporary critique of television and internet culture, as Margaret Kohn has recently shown.<sup>14</sup> The public space, based on seeing (one another) rather than interacting and debating (as in Habermas’ public sphere), creates passive and depoliticized citizens who can be easily manipulated by political authorities. Life itself becomes a “spectacle,” in which we are spectators rather than participants.

About a generation after Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham offered his radical proposal for penitentiary reform in England, based on the same principle of transparency. In his *Panopticon* (1787), Bentham adopted his brother’s architectural design for a perfect prison, a circular structure in which prisoners could be permanently kept under observation. He believed that such a design was suitable also to hospitals, madhouses, manufactories and schools. He disclosed, albeit in a cursory manner, his deeper thoughts on the notion of permanent observation by claiming that:

Ideal perfection, if that were the object, would require that each person should actually be in that predicament during every instant of time. This being impossible, the next thing to be wished for is, that, at every instant, seeing reason to believe as much, and not being able to satisfy himself to the contrary, he should *conceive* himself to be so.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See David Heyd, “Tact: Sense, Sensitivity, and Virtue,” *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 38 (1995): 217–31.

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Kohn, “Homo Spectator: Public Space in the Age of the Spectacle,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 34 (2008): 467–86.

<sup>15</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *The Panopticon Writings* (ed. M. Bozovic; London, 1995), Letter I. Rousseau is mentioned in the chapter on schools (Letter XXI), where Bentham ironically comments that he would have resisted the idea of constant inspection for Émile, but would have probably embraced it for Sophia.

Being “inspected” is a key to social reform and moral self-correction. Notice the twist from Rousseau’s ideal of transparency as personal authenticity to the social reformist view of this ideal in Bentham. Rousseau should be understood as searching for a “*panopticon* of the self” towards absolute transparency of one’s own consciousness, transparency which is denied in the relations with other minds.

This explains why the theatrical gaze is for Rousseau a mere illusion. Peeping into other people’s lives through protagonists on stage can never provide us with genuine insight because the objects of theatrical look are not real but represented figures which are mere substitutes. Unsurprisingly, these figures evoke only second-hand emotions which, unlike Bentham’s “omnipresent inspector,” cannot stimulate any moral transformation in the spectator. For Rousseau, the spectator is passive and hence the victim of emotional manipulation and flattery, rather than the active moulder of moral character (27). Only when we leave the theatre culture for that of the traditional clubs and public festivals do we get closer to mutual transparency and hence to genuine fellow-feeling (which can be contrasted with Bentham’s unidirectional relation of hierarchical supervision).

### *Theatre, Clubs, and Festivals*

The theatrical manifestation of representation is acting. To the question of what the talent of the actor is, Rousseau answers:

It is the art of counterfeiting himself, of putting on another character than his own, of appearing different than he is, of becoming passionate in cold blood, of saying what he does not think as naturally as if he really did think it, and, finally, of forgetting his own place by dint of taking another’s. (79)

Acting creates a *rift*—first, between the actor and the dramatic figure he portrays; secondly, within his own self; and finally, between himself and the spectators. Since the figure represented is fictitious, Rousseau bluntly says that the actor “annihilates himself, as it were, and is lost in his hero” (81). This is the gravest sin—the loss of individuality—and a serious moral blemish; for how can a decent man play “a rascal’s role in the theatre... using all his talent to make criminal maxims convincing, maxims for which he himself has only disgust?” (81). Acting is the ultimate menace to moral integrity. So for Rousseau, the very nature of the theatre as fictitious is directly responsible for the moral degeneration of

the actor.<sup>16</sup> But it is also the source of the rift between the actor and the spectator. In direct contrast to the nineteenth-century doctrine of “the suspension of disbelief,” Rousseau argues that

most tragic actions are only pure fables, events known to be inventions of the poet, and so do not make a strong impression on the audience; as a result of showing them that we want to instruct them, we no longer instruct them. (28)

The spectators’ awareness of the *contrived* nature of what they see on stage makes any attempt to create genuine feelings of compassion self-defeating. The actor can never be convincing when the audience is aware that he himself does not believe in what he declaims.

What I might designate the “secret understanding” between the actor and the spectator concerning the nature of theatrical illusion concedes to the theatre but one aim—entertainment—and its test of success is the audience’s applause. Hence the actor’s desperate effort to flatter the audience, to appeal to its expectations and taste. From the moral and political perspective, the theatre, according to Rousseau, is typically conservative, lacking any transformative effect.

Rousseau complements his radical critique of the theatre by reminding the readers of his *Letter* of the ideal alternative; that is, forms of public entertainment which are not based on mediation, imitation, and deceitful representation. Not only is the city of Geneva *threatened* by D’Alembert’s proposal—it simply does not *need* a theatre. It already has its own unique traditional forms of public diversion. Rousseau refers to festivals and to the *cercles* (clubs, or, in the more distant past, “societies”). These are usually informal meeting places for about fifteen men who “gamble, chat, read, drink, and smoke” (99). Their members are also engaged in walking and sports. Women have their own clubs in private homes where they play cards, serve refreshments, and are busy in “inexhaustible gossiping” (99). In both formats, these amusements are “simple and innocent” (100), based on equality and intimate friendship, thus maintaining some of the

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<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to contrast Rousseau’s view of the art of acting with that of his contemporary, Denis Diderot. Diderot sees nothing wrong *per se* in imitation, and the more emotionally distant the actor keeps himself from the figure he portrays, the greater he is as an actor. Furthermore, truthful acting does not mean showing things as they are in nature, and the chief virtue of an actor is the ability to imitate emotion without feeling it; to represent any character because he himself has no character. See *The Paradox of Acting* (ed. W. Archer; New York, 1957 [1778]), 19, 20, 33, 46, 48, and 71.

ancient republican morals. Most important for our discussion is that the clubs are exempted from the artificial norms of refined rhetoric, fashion, and bourgeois manners, which are so central to the Parisian salon culture (105). Directness in human relationships is often connected by Rousseau with vulgarity, but vulgarity is morally superior to the indecency associated with the theatricality and hypocrisy of the salon. Even though the “circles” have some negative side effects, they are not—like the theatre—bad in themselves (107–8). Even gossip, which constitutes much of the female clubs’ activity, has a redeeming feature which is interestingly connected to the ideal of transparency and its Benthamite implementation:

How many scandals are prevented for fear of these severe observers? They [the women in their *cercles*] almost perform the function of censors in our city. It is thus that in the great days of Rome, the citizens, watching one another, publicly accused one another out of zeal for justice. (106)

Exposure to real people, one’s fellow citizens (unlike fictitious heroes on stage), promotes virtue and justice in the community. Such activities create a mutual social *panopticon*!

The even better antidote to the theatre in Geneva is the *festival*. Unlike the theatre, the festival takes place in the open air and in full light. Consequently it does not exacerbate loneliness but creates a true sense of commonality. It does not suffer from the alienating effects of the theatre since it does not represent anything. People are not passive spectators but active participants. They are engaged in a mutual relationship of interacting with one another, rather than in the unidirectional relation of watching a show on stage:

But what then will be the objects of these entertainments? What will be shown in them? Nothing, if you please. With liberty, wherever abundance reigns, well-being also reigns. Plant a stake crowned with flowers in the middle of a square; gather the people together there, and you will have a festival. Do better yet; let the spectators become an entertainment to themselves; make them actors themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united. (126)

Although Rousseau does not mention in this context his fundamental distinction between *amour de soi* and *amour propre*, the way he describes the festival expresses his faith in the festival’s ability to bridge the gap between the two. *Amour de soi* (love of self) is the natural sentiment which natural man shares with the animal world; it produces virtue and humanity in creatures like us who are governed “by reason modified by pity.” In the state of nature “each particular man regards himself as the sole spectator

to observe him" as well as judge his merit. *Amour propre* (self-love), on the other hand, is vanity. Its crucial component is *comparison* to others, seeing oneself *through* others, being obsessed by the way one looks to others as the source of self-esteem.<sup>17</sup> This is the sentiment which gradually develops in tandem with civilization, social cooperation, property, and self-consciousness. It is a typically *mediated* sentiment and cognitively requires the ability to represent an image of oneself and of others.

Now, the two kinds of love usually seem incompatible or mutually exclusive to Rousseau; their presence creates the dilemma of the need to choose between the mode of precivilized, natural existence, to which we cannot and do not wish to return, and the inauthentic mode of struggle for self-definition through others (involving vanity, vengeance, greed, and competition). The theatre fosters *amour propre* and narcissism, but the festival is a miraculous unification of individuals into a community since it enables them to "see and love" themselves in the others. How is that achieved?

The secret of the festival lies in its spontaneity, the lack of premeditated structure. Unlike the theatre, it is based on music and dance, rather than "spectacle."<sup>18</sup> Both these arts are nonrepresentational and refer directly to human emotions without the mediation of concepts and images. They do not depend on language or other symbolic representations. They are communal without being competitive; they are self-sufficient in the sense that they require no pomp or showing off. The festival creates ecstatic conditions in which participants lose their individual *personas* and do not know what they are doing.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality* (the Second Discourse), in *The First and Second Discourses*, 221–22.

<sup>18</sup> Dugan and Strong rightly make the point that this music is "formless," in contrast to Rameau's harmony-based music, of which Rousseau took a harsh view. C. N. Dugan and Tracy B. Strong, "Music, Politics, Theatre, and Representation in Rousseau," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau* (ed. P. Riley; Cambridge, 2001), 334–35.

<sup>19</sup> Much of this description is derived from a footnote at the very end of the *Letter* (135–36), in which Rousseau recollects his childhood experience at such a festival in Geneva, which he attended with his proud and patriotic father. Rousseau does not consider another form of theatre, which might have avoided many of his objections—that of the marionettes. It is worth noting that Kleist, two generations later, argued for the superiority of marionette theatre, due to the puppets' total lack of consciousness. Kleist argues that the conscious movement of a body is necessarily unnatural and graceless. Only a marionette can be trusted not to slip into affectation—an argument Rousseau might have found convincing. Heinrich von Kleist, "The Puppet Theatre," in *Selected Writings* (ed. and trans. D. Constantine; London, 1997 [1810]), 411–16. And for a very similar and beautifully

*Political Representation and the General Will*

Rousseau was no less interested in the issue of political representation than in that of theatrical representation. The structural analogies he traced between these two kinds of representation have attracted the notice of scholars. But the starting point of any such comparison must note the crucial difference: in the theatre the actor represents “a chimerical being” (81), whereas in politics real people represent real people. The problem of representation is accordingly different. The false or deceitful nature of the theatre originates from the fictitious status of the represented figures, and its moral flaw arises out of the implicit agreement between actors and spectators to ignore that fact for the sake of entertainment. The danger of political representation is associated with the pretense of one person to express another real person’s *will*. The problem of the theatre is that both actors and spectators are deluding primarily themselves, while in the politics of parliaments, representatives mislead their constituents into making them believe that they represent their will. A preacher, says Rousseau, in contrast to an actor, “speaks only in his name . . . the man and the role being the same” (81). Hence, he does not suffer from an inner split of personality. But when it comes to political representation, this split reemerges, this time between two individual wills. The issue is one of delegation rather than imitation.

Rousseau has Hobbes in mind when he elaborates his opposing reflections on political representation. Although Hobbes is exclusively concerned with political rather than artistic representation, his way of introducing the concept, derived explicitly from Cicero, is “theatrical.” Hobbes acknowledges the source and etymology of the concept of *person* in the Greek mask—“the *disguise*, or *outward appearance* of a man, counterfeited on the Stage.”<sup>20</sup> When someone is not representing himself, he is called an “artificial person”; and if he represents another real person, as in politics (rather than a fictitious figure on stage), he is regarded as acting with the *authority* of the represented person.<sup>21</sup> Historically the relation of

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portrayed view, see Shmuel J. Agnon, *Herrn Lublins Laden* (trans. I. Kraft; Frankfurt am Main, 1997), 178–80.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (ed. R. Tuck; Cambridge, 1996), 112 (Chapter 16).

<sup>21</sup> Quentin Skinner, who offers a comprehensive historical background for Hobbes’s views in terms of the big constitutional debates in England of the 1640s, distinguishes between two models of representation—resemblance (imitation) and authorization, the former characterizing visual or theatrical portrayals, the latter the delegation of power. Skinner’s thesis is that the authorization model is adopted by Hobbes from his Parliamentarian opponents, even though the mechanism of authorization he advocates is

authorization was first manifest in the legal proceedings of tribunals and was only later extended to the political context.

The authorization model is easier to comprehend when two individuals are related as representative and represented. But when it comes to politics, the representative stands and acts for *many* individuals. This gap between private and collective is a problem for any “individualist” philosopher like Hobbes and Rousseau. But the two resolve this tension in different ways. Hobbes’s original view is that the very act of authorization by many individuals is what makes these individuals a unified collective, one person (a “Body Politick”), a fact which enables the authorized individual (ruler) to represent them all:

A *Common-wealth* is said to be *Instituted*, when a *Multitude* of men do Agree, and *Covenant*, every one, with every one, that to whatsoever *Man*, or *Assembly of Men*, shall be given by the major part, the *Right to Present* the Person of them all (that is to say, to be their *Representative*)...<sup>22</sup>

And most importantly for our purpose is Hobbes’s statement that “It is the *Unity* of the Representer, not the *Unity* of the Represented, that maketh the Person *One*.”<sup>23</sup>

When we move to Rousseau’s theory of political representation we find a reversal of Hobbes’s view: it is only in virtue of some fundamental unity of the governed people (its *volonté générale*) that the power of the ruler is legitimized. Rousseau quotes Grotius as saying that “a people is a people before giving itself to a king.”<sup>24</sup> This has interesting implications for the analysis of representation. In Hobbes we have just two stages, the natural and the social. In the one, people are a “multitude,” lacking any social structure; in the other they become a political community through the authorization of the sovereign. In Rousseau we have three stages: the natural, in which people resemble animals and lead a presocial way of life (albeit much more docile than in Hobbes); the civil, in which people associate with each other in the form of a social contract and become *a* people; and finally the political or constitutional stage, in which a political community decides the form of government appropriate to it. Only at the last stage does the question of representation arise.

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obviously radically different. But in any case, the Royalist idea of representation based on the similarity between Parliament and the general populace is rejected by Hobbes. See Quentin Skinner, “Hobbes on Representation,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2005): 155–84, and particularly 164.

<sup>22</sup> *Leviathan*, 121.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>24</sup> *The Social Contract* (ed. V. Gourevitch; Cambridge, 1997), 49 (Book I, Chapter 5).



This explains why for Rousseau, as against Hobbes, *sovereignty* is not created by an act of authorization and why the sovereign does not represent the people. Sovereignty lies *in* the people and hence cannot be detached from it or granted by it to any particular person or groups of persons. The nonrepresentational formation of the political body is described by Rousseau:

At once, in place of the private person of each contracting party, this act of association produces a moral and collective body made up of as many members as the assembly has voices, and which receives by this same act its unity, its common *self*, its life and its will.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, from a multitude of individuals, each representing one's own self, people become a community, that is, individuals who represent *themselves* through their association with other such individuals. No one represents *others*. No private will, says Rousseau, can represent the general will. Only now, when a "republic" is created, can its (now) citizens choose representatives in the standard (Hobbesian) sense; i.e., those who will engage in the business of governing in their name.

Rousseau's logic is compelling. Authorization is limited, since the will cannot be transferred or represented by a ruler: "The sovereign, which is nothing but a collective being, can only be represented by itself."<sup>26</sup> It seems that self-representation, in both arts and politics, is a metaphor which boils down to no representation. As noted by Rousseau commentators, the "general will" is pure and actual *presence*, both in the sense that it is unmediated existence and in the sense that it has no temporal permanence.<sup>27</sup> It is immediate in both being unmediated and in existing now (rather than in the past or future). Unlike private wills, which are concealed in the privacy of the individual and hence are at least partly opaque to others, the general will, which expresses the common good, the *res publica*, is fully transparent, accessible to any person exercising his or her reason. It does not need representation because it is there, open to all.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 50 (Book I, Chapter 6).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 57 (Book II, Chapter 1).

<sup>27</sup> Dugan and Strong, "Music, Politics, Theatre, and Representation in Rousseau," 332. And see Derrida's famous reading of Rousseau, including his claim that Rousseau holds a naïve conception of representation. Derrida says that by assuming the difference between the representer and the represented Rousseau tries to go back to the original "presence" in both language and politics. But the only absolute presence is birth, which for Rousseau meant the origin of all his misfortunes. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (trans. G. C. Spivak; Baltimore, 1976), 296 and 309.



Rousseau says that in the republic created by the social contract people “call themselves *citizens* as participants in the sovereign authority, and *subjects* as subjected to the laws of the State.”<sup>28</sup> This is the political analogue of the ideal of the festival, in which participants are at once actors and spectators.<sup>29</sup> In both cases individuals are immersed in a collective entity, a community, in which there is no hierarchy and no asymmetry, which is typical of political representation and the theatre. The general will and the festival are both phenomena in which particularity gives way to unity, and alienation is overcome by a genuine sense of concord and rejoicing in the public good. Starobinski highlights this collective spirit as manifested in both the general political assemblies and the annual festivals.<sup>30</sup> Both are spheres of full transparency.

“Where the Represented is, there no longer is a Representative,” says Rousseau.<sup>31</sup> This is the ideal of direct democracy, of a system of government in which the sovereign (the people) is the governing body. But of course Rousseau is aware that such an unmediated system of popular government is empirically impossible and that every polity requires magistrates. He also argues that although the larger the number of magistrates, the closer the government is to expressing the general will, it is equally true that the larger the body of magistrates, the less effective is the governing body.<sup>32</sup> In small communities, like the Greek polis or Rousseau’s Geneva, a relatively direct democratic system, based on periodical general assemblies, can be implemented.

Rousseau devotes a whole chapter to a damning critique of political representation.<sup>33</sup> When citizens nominate delegates to the assembly rather than participate in it directly, the end of the state is near. The basic symptom of the decline of a republic is the priority given to the private interests as against the general good. In the context of our discussion, it is noteworthy that Rousseau points to the same fundamental danger in relation to both political and theatrical representation—the self-exemption from moral responsibility.<sup>34</sup> By acting *through* representatives, citizens,

<sup>28</sup> *Social Contract*, 51 (Book I, Chapter 6).

<sup>29</sup> Victor Gourevitch, “Rousseau on the Arts and Sciences,” *Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1972): 743.

<sup>30</sup> Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 96–97.

<sup>31</sup> *Social Contract*, 112 (Book III, Chapter 14).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 89 (Book III, Chapter 2).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 113–16 (Book III, Chapter 15).

<sup>34</sup> Amal Banarjee makes an interesting comparison between Rousseau and Brecht. Both are highly suspicious of traditional theatre as having a real moral and political impact. But

exactly like the theatre spectators shedding tears about the fate of the virtuous hero, feel *as if* they have done their share (morally speaking) in identifying with and promoting the good. This is of course self-delusion; even worse, it may involve moral self-indulgence. Representation creates a *vicarious* sense of political action and participation. A central manifestation of such mediated citizenship is the use of money to *buy* services for the country that the citizens themselves should have provided with their own efforts (like hiring mercenaries to conduct wars). Money in general is considered by Rousseau to be another form of destructive mediation, a substitute for direct work and direct enjoyment.<sup>35</sup>

Mediation undermines freedom. People, who *delegate* the power to exercise their will directly, can enjoy only *illusory* freedom, the freedom from the hassle of taking responsibility for the running of the affairs of the state. This is similar to the illusion of the theatre audiences who believe they can express their identification and compassion with human suffering through identifying with fictitious figures on stage. The privacy and darkness of the polling booth gives us (that is, the few who still take part in the vote today...) that momentary and false satisfaction of participation in government, which is very similar to the sense of participation in the life of the dramatic personae in the theatre. "The English people thinks it is free," comments Rousseau, yet "it is greatly mistaken; it is free only during the election of Members of Parliament; as soon as they are elected, it is enslaved, it is nothing." This enslavement is inevitable, since, as we have seen, sovereignty cannot be represented: "either it is the same or it is different; there is no middle ground."<sup>36</sup> Worse, the very attempt to represent a people *annihilates* it as a people, since the people "represented" gives up its identity, as constituted by its general and inalienable will. The paradox of representation, as we have referred to it in the first section of the article, cannot be resolved.

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Brecht tries to radicalize the theatre rather than reject it and believes that exactly by distancing the spectator emotionally from the stage, the danger of false (and easy) identification can be overcome. See Amal Banerjee, "Rousseau's Concept of Theatre," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 17 (1977): 175–76.

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, *Confessions*, 37: "I am less tempted by money than by things, because there is always between the money we possess and the object we desire some intermediary; whereas between the thing itself and our enjoyment of it there is none."

<sup>36</sup> *Social Contract*, 114 (Book III, Chapter 15). Historically, Rousseau points out, the very idea of representatives is modern, arising out of the feudal system of government, which is iniquitous, degrading, and absurd.

*No Civilization without Representation*

Going back to the optical imagery employed in the analysis of the ideal of transparency, we recall that light cannot be seen unless it is either broken or reflected, i.e., unless it encounters some form of “obstruction” or split.<sup>37</sup> It seems that this principle of optics is a good metaphor for the working of consciousness in general, and for both the theatrical and political theories of representation in Rousseau. The fact that there is no frictionless reality, e.g., within the bounds of our planet, does not mean that physics should not have a clear notion about such an *idealized* reality when coming to formulate the laws of motion. Similarly, Rousseau states that

[I]t is no light undertaking to separate what is original from what is artificial in the present nature of man, and to know correctly a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never existed, which probably never will exist, and about which it is nevertheless necessary to have precise notions in order to judge our present state correctly.<sup>38</sup>

Rousseau realizes that we can never achieve complete transparency between individual consciousnesses, nor even within a single conscious being. But that does not mean that perfect lucidity is not the methodological standard by which we have to measure the validity and value of various kinds of representation, both in politics and in the arts.

*The Second Discourse* is a detailed genealogy of the irreversible evolution of human civilization from that idealized, “primitive,” presocial existence. All the milestones in this long anthropological reconstruction are connected with mediation: that of general concepts in the formation of language; that of reason and cooperation in the creation of agriculture; that of the separation of individuals from each other in the emergence of property and the idea of justice. Even the most basic, prerational stance towards the other, which underlies all the other virtues, i.e., pity or compassion, requires the ability to stand in the place of the other—that is, to *represent* him or her.<sup>39</sup> Of more direct relevance to our concern is the conception of the development of art out of leisure. People started

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<sup>37</sup> Thus, even the ideally transparent essence of the divine realm in the portrayal of Strauss's *Frau ohne Schatten*, mentioned above, can be portrayed by the opera's director only in a system of glassy partitions and reflecting mirrors; i.e., means which can be perceived by our power of sight.

<sup>38</sup> *The Second Discourse*, 92–93.

<sup>39</sup> David Marshall, “Rousseau and the State of Theater,” *Representations* 13 (1986): 84–114. Sympathy and self-love are themselves “theatrical.”

assembling around a tree, amusing themselves with singing and dancing. But then

Each one began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself, and public esteem had a value. The one who sang or danced the best . . . became the most highly considered; and that was the first step toward inequality and, at the same time, toward vice.<sup>40</sup>

These seeds of *amour propre*, pride and competition, proved to be “fatal to happiness and innocence,” which was of course not limited to art and amusement but quickly spread into the political sphere. Human beings started competing for power, honor, and wealth, using force and thus precipitating the deterioration of human society to a degree that compelled them to delegate their power to a ruler. But in the course of this gloomy description of the inescapable corruption of humanity, Rousseau admits the equally significant benefits:

[T]o this ardor to be talked about, to this furor to distinguish oneself, which nearly always keeps us *outside of ourselves*, we owe what is best and worst among men, our virtues and our vices, our sciences and our errors, our conquerors and our philosophers—that is to say, a multitude of bad things as against a small number of good ones.<sup>41</sup>

Only by distancing ourselves from ourselves can we achieve virtue and civilized existence. Some measure of alienation from the natural world, from other individuals and from our own selves is the key to the formation of any kind of culture as well as a well-ordered polity.

So, behind the scathing critique of representation, Rousseau never fails to recognize both its inevitability and its value. Rational beings cannot truly wish to return to their “savage” state, to the state of nature. However, Rousseau insists on distinguishing between *kinds* of representation, subjecting only some of them to the harsh judgment of the theatre and of the English system of parliamentary representation. The real sin for him is not neutral (or conscious) representation, but *impersonation*. The *OED* defines “impersonate” as “to pretend to be (another person) for the purpose of entertainment [theatre] or for fraud [politics].” In the theatre,

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<sup>40</sup> *The Second Discourse*, 149.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 175 (my emphasis). See also 179: “The savage lives within himself; the sociable man, always outside of himself, knows how to live only in the opinion of others; and it is, so to speak, from their judgment alone that he draws the sentiment of his own existence.”

impersonation is deception;<sup>42</sup> in politics, it is usurpation. Both are loathed by Rousseau, since they take us further away from moral truth and from freedom, respectively.

But there are legitimate forms of artistic and political representation. Without going in detail into Rousseau's complex analysis of music (and recall that he was himself a semi-professional musician), his main reason for putting music above the theatre is that it does not represent anything in the world. But it does represent something in us, and that is *emotion*.<sup>43</sup> Music creates an intrinsic, natural relation rather than the external and conventional relation of theatrical and pictorial representation.<sup>44</sup> And even the theatre is not universally condemned. Since its deceptive nature and corrupting effect are context-sensitive, Rousseau concedes that in a corrupt society, like Paris, governed by bad "manners," the theatre cannot really do much harm, whereas in good societies, like Geneva, it may cause degeneration.<sup>45</sup> In other words, in evaluating the moral role of the theatre, historical and pragmatic considerations should be taken into account.

In politics, too, Rousseau regards direct rule as merely an ideal. A people can never rule itself in the literal sense. Government always requires some representation or delegation of power. It is indeed the case that sovereignty cannot be represented by another sovereign, but that does not mean that the "general will" is not represented at all. It *is* represented

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<sup>42</sup> David Osipovich, "What Rousseau Can Teach Us about Live Theatrical Performance," *Journal of Art and Art Criticism* 62 (2004): 355–62. Osipovich's thesis is that *live* performance is to be blamed for the deceptive nature of theatrical representation, and accordingly that painting and literature do not suffer from that threat.

<sup>43</sup> *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (trans. J. H. Moran; New York, 1966), 59–61 (Chapter 15). In the following chapter Rousseau makes a controversial claim that music has an advantage over painting because it "can represent things that cannot be heard, while it is impossible to represent in painting things that cannot be seen" (64). See also the excellent article by Ruth HaCohen, which is a history of the idea of pity, sympathy, and compassion from Plato to the eighteenth century, with a particular emphasis on music. Unlike pictorial representation, which is spatial, music is based on sympathetic projection in time and can bridge the distance separating two subjects. Ruth HaCohen, "The Music of Sympathy in the Art of the Baroque: Or, the Use of Difference to Overcome Indifference," *Poetics Today* 22 (2001): 607–50.

<sup>44</sup> Dugan and Strong, "Music, Politics, Theatre, and Representation in Rousseau," offer an insightful analysis of the way music solves the problem of representation for Rousseau. "Music does not by its nature require that we give ourselves over to that which is not our self" (346); i.e., unlike the theatre and representative government, in which our will is controlled by actors and politicians, musical experience arises out of our own imagination—that is, leaves us free and autonomous.

<sup>45</sup> Fonna Forman-Barzilai, "The Emergence of Contextualism in Rousseau's Political Thought: The Case of Parisian Theatre in the *Lettre à D'Alembert*," *History of Political Thought* 24 (2003): 435–63.

in the individual wills of the citizens. Unlike some readings of Rousseau's doctrine, I suggest that the general will is not an independent abstract entity. All there is are individuals and their wills. They constitute the general will, which could not exist without them. But the general will is the function of the wills of individuals *on the condition* that they exercise it properly, namely by taking into account only what they themselves consider as the public good. The key text for the kind of political representation which is in Rousseau's eyes conceptually necessary and rational is the famous passage in the *Social Contract* which distinguishes between aggregated private wills (*volonté de tous*) and the general will (*volonté générale*):

[t]he latter looks only to the common interest, the former looks to private interest, and is nothing but a sum of particular wills; but if, from these same wills, one takes away the pluses and the minuses, which cancel each other out, what is left as the sum of the differences is the general will.<sup>46</sup>

So, the general will is not an abstract, independent power, above and beyond the individual citizens (as some of Rousseau's foes argued), but a product of a proper procedure of setting off private wills against each other. Even more interesting for our purpose is Rousseau's original footnote referring to Marquis d'Argenson's explanation that the very concept of private interest can be understood only as standing in opposition to other private interests. This brings Rousseau to state that agreement between interests is a product of their opposition, or

If there were no different interests, the common interest would scarcely be sensible since it would never encounter obstacles: every thing would run by itself, and politics would cease to be an art.<sup>47</sup>

This is a clear articulation of the idea that absolute transparency does not make sense, that "obstruction" (in Starobinski's terminology) is constitutive for politics as it is for art and for optics.

Accordingly, Rousseau, following Machiavelli, sees the great threat to well-ordered society not in private wills (since they constitute the general will) but in *factions* and parties, which as *mediators* of the public good undermine the expression of the genuine will of individuals. But for this expression of the general will to take form, individuals must be given the proper conditions for rational deliberation, independent of the undesirable

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<sup>46</sup> *Social Contract*, 60.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

effect of factional interests, that is, by having no communication with others. The general will is achieved by this method just because individuals “represent” only themselves, or rather only their *true* selves—and this is the self that is reflected in independent rational deliberation. Philosophically speaking, the understanding of representation as “nonreflexive” denies the possibility of self-representation; nevertheless, once we adopt Rousseau’s view of the human individual as *internally* split between the rational and irrational parts, the idea of self-representation makes sense. Not only does it make sense, it is the basis of the constitution of a politically legitimate republic.

And again, the analogue to the arts is compelling. Comedy should never be allowed in Geneva, since “it would serve as an instrument for factions, parties, and private vengeance,” and “would soon degenerate into satires and representations of persons [individuals]” (*Letter*, 121). On the other hand, the festival is a gathering which is designed “so that each sees and loves himself *in the others* so that all will be better united” (126; my emphasis). The common joy of the public games and dances is the counterpart of the public good in politics. In contrast to the ancient dance of the savages in the state of nature, which gave rise to the catastrophic emotion of *amour propre*, the festival is the place where individuals represent themselves, not through their private interests and emotions, but through their identification with others. They expose their public *persona*. In the political arena, the rational deliberation in privacy about the public good forms a mirror image of the individual’s complete immersion in the festive communal activity. But they have the same structure: individuals become united by representing themselves as social beings.

### *Dispensing with Representation, Nevertheless*

Rousseau never felt that he overcame the problem of representation. Despite his attempts to distinguish between deceitful, manipulative, and exploitative forms of representation in politics and art, and faithful, legitimate, unifying, and edifying forms, he never gave up the personal struggle for unmediated authenticity. His later life and work demonstrate this desperate effort.

In the first paragraph of *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (his last, unfinished work), Rousseau describes the final stage of his life. He is now left “alone on earth,” leading a completely solitary life. His question is “what am I?” and the answer can be given only through unmediated introspection,



with neither political nor artistic intercession.<sup>48</sup> These seem to be the ideal conditions for authentic self-examination. Furthermore, they enable him to sense his self-sufficient joy in his own existence, pure contentment which is not mediated by any emotion, the closest to the original, untarnished *amour de soi*.<sup>49</sup> But Rousseau himself admits that these conditions led him to a world of madness, in which the boundaries between wakefulness and sleep, life and death, had become blurred, as did the boundaries between “thoughts” and “reveries,” rational self-reflection and delusion. But since pure self-awareness is unobtainable, Rousseau, even in his solitary existence, must still negotiate with other human beings. This he does through *writing*. The confession, the ultimate act of self-examination, must be conducted through another person, be it a priest or a reader.<sup>50</sup> And the self must therefore be in some way represented. Writing puts to use a conventional system of linguistic representation and by that already concedes defeat in the struggle for unmediated presentation. The search for perfect authenticity and complete transparency is futile, and insistence on it proves, for the aging Rousseau, to be an obsessive project of a desperate man. The escape to solipsism leads to the annihilation of the very self which Rousseau, throughout his life was—indeed authentically—seeking.

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<sup>48</sup> Science, too, is rejected, as being conducted only for the sake of utility. Rousseau chooses to engage in botanical observation (and puts his “findings” in writing in several essays). This is a kind of mental activity which is intentionally chosen for its lack of any emotional dimension. See Christopher Kelly, “Rousseau and the Case against (and for) the Arts,” in *The Legacy of Rousseau* (ed. C. Orwin and N. Tarcov; Chicago, 1997), 36.

<sup>49</sup> *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau: Vol. 8* (ed. C. Kelly; Hanover, NH, 2000), 3 and 46.

<sup>50</sup> For the role of the reader in Rousseau's *Reveries*, see Eli Friedlander, *J. J. Rousseau: An Afterlife of Words* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), Chapters 2 and 6. Friedlander also compares the festival to the general will in terms of “presence” (Chapter 9), but he does not note the limits of transparency in both and the necessary role of the individual in constituting the collective will or aesthetic experience.



THE INVENTION OF THE COUNTER-ENLIGHTENMENT:  
THE CASE FOR THE DEFENSE

Joseph Mali

In recent historiography of the Enlightenment it has become a commonplace to define this era not merely as the “Age of Reason,” but also, and primarily, as the “Age of Criticism.” As Ernst Cassirer has pointed out in his classic, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932):

The eighteenth century is very fond of calling itself the “century of philosophy,” but it is not less fond of calling itself the “century of criticism.” The two phrases are only different expressions of the same situation, intended to characterize from diverse angles the fundamental intellectual energy which permeates the era and to which it owes its greatest trends of thought.<sup>1</sup>

True to that mission, some of the leading luminaries of the age—the most well-known being Jean-Jacques Rousseau—directed their criticism at the ideology of the Enlightenment movement itself. Consequently, albeit unintentionally, because of their practical implementation of the Enlightenment’s insistence on criticism, these ideological opponents of the movement may justifiably be considered partakers in the Enlightenment, even if seemingly in spite of themselves.

Alas, this anomaly has been largely ignored by historians of the Enlightenment; there has not even been a suitable term to define it. Obviously, the *philosophes* themselves, and generations of scholars following them, were well aware of this contrarian movement, for who could ignore such classic statements of opposition as Rousseau’s two *Discourses* or Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*? But even so, historians have been hard pressed to furnish an adequate characterization or proper definition, particularly since these critical opponents of the Enlightenment, unlike its other enemies, did not belong to the clerical or monarchical orders, nor indeed to any particular class that was threatened by the libertarian and

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<sup>1</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (trans. F. C. A. Koelln and J. P. Pettegrove; Princeton, 1951), 275.

egalitarian slogans of the Enlightenment. Rather, they were independent men of letters and science, who assumed the common posture of public moralists or “intellectuals” as befitting men of Enlightenment. However conservative and even reactionary they may have been, they framed their worldview in analytical terms, using logical arguments, and did all that in a style which was as intelligent and almost as elegant as that of the French *raisonneurs*. The only difference between them and their illustrious contemporaries and adversaries, then, was that they employed the Enlightenment’s own critical methodology in order to combat its critical ideology. That opposition to the essential ideology of the Enlightenment was the crucial difference between these men and some other critical observers of the Enlightenment, who objected to certain assumptions in its ideology but nevertheless believed in the fundamental notion of enlightenment. The latter group included men like Voltaire, who attacked the excessive optimism of his fellow *philosophes*; David Hume, who questioned their unsustainable rationalism; and Montesquieu, who did not believe, unlike so many of his fellow *gens de lettres* in the *Club de l’Entresol* or in the *Académie Française*, in any form of monarchic absolutism, however “enlightened” it might be. These and similar liberal thinkers operated, as it were, from within the Enlightenment; and if occasionally they turned against it, they nevertheless continued to believe in its general direction. They all shared the belief that the process of “civilization”—a term invented, fittingly, by the Enlightenment<sup>2</sup>—through critical rationalization and technological innovation, would ultimately lead to salvation; a secular salvation, of course, that in the parlance of the age meant the emancipation of modern humanity from all the self-imposed inhibitions stemming from its supposed “immaturity.”

That is the main message of Immanuel Kant’s famous essay, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” (1784). Kant defines “immaturity” (*Unmündigkeit*) as the reluctance of men in the modern age to use their own understanding freely and independently for their own welfare.<sup>3</sup> For the participants in the European—and particularly Prussian—Enlightenment, what Kant meant thereby was clear: that modern man had become mature enough to liberate himself from the burden of tradition, above all from religious superstition. More concretely, Kant

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<sup>2</sup> Jean Starobinski, “The Word *Civilization*,” in idem, *Blessings in Disguise: Or, the Morality of Evil* (trans. A. Goldhager; Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 1–35.

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” (1784), in idem, *Political Writings* (trans. and ed. H. Reiss; Cambridge, 1991), 54.

also urges his readers to overcome their tendency to rely on experts and others in positions of authority who purportedly know what is best for them. Such childish adherence to the wisdom of the elders may have been necessary and even salutary in earlier times, in the youthful age of mankind, when men were as yet unable to use their own understanding; but somehow, mainly because of “indolence and cowardice,” modern men still retain their habitual modes of thought and life. As Kant would have it, all that a person must do in order to become enlightened, then, is to dare to think—*sapere aude!*—freely and critically about the traditional norms and forms of life by which he abides.<sup>4</sup> Once he has done so, he will surely discover that many philosophical or historical truths are just myths.

Kant, however, was not as radical as this critical injunction might make him out to be. He was well aware that emancipation from mythical conceptions and traditions is too difficult a task for any individual who is not a philosopher. Moreover, if followed literally and all too freely, the *sapere aude* principle might even be politically dangerous, as too much independence might stir up disobedience. Consequently, Kant set down certain stipulations for the process of emancipation: that it must be carried out “in the public sphere” and be open to the whole “reading community”; that is, designed for—but also confined to—the already “enlightened” classes in society. Above all, quite literally, one can always trust in Friedrich II, with a huge standing army, ready to act if the process of Enlightenment gets into trouble. But Kant is quite certain that the promoters of the Enlightenment can accomplish their task without that intervention, as long as they take care to expose historical traditions and even political institutions as myths in the proper critical measures.<sup>5</sup>

For Kant and fellow proponents of the Enlightenment in Germany, among them many devout Protestants, such critical measures were necessary in order to explain away the biblical and other theological myths of Christianity. Much like the liberal theologians, the so-called Neologists, who sought to find in the *mythos* of early Christianity a certain *logos* that still prevailed in modernity, so did Kant seek to achieve a reconciliation of religion and reason—yet he insisted on the priority of the latter in any case of contradiction. That was the main argument in his late book *Religion within the Boundaries of Reason Alone* (1793–1794). He thus argues, for example, that the biblical story of the Fall contains within its mythic

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 57–59.

form certain metaphysical truths which have proven to be essential for the moral development of humanity, but he then adds that these truths must now be elaborated, and thus corroborated, by rational arguments. Hence, inasmuch as biblical mythology could be shown to have helped in spreading the rational moral law in primitive society and in history, it was still most useful for the general process of Enlightenment. However, this relative toleration of mythology “within the limits of reason” merely serves to reinforce the modernistic assumptions of Kant and his followers, namely that myth was a prior and inferior form of thought, destined to be abrogated (*aufgehoben*) once the process of Enlightenment had run its course. The last great proponent of this cultural ideology in Germany was the neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer, and in his two late masterworks, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932) and *The Myth of the State* (1946), both written under the shadow of National Socialism, he reiterated the fundamental opposition of the German Enlightenment to all forms of mythology.<sup>6</sup>

Following from these fundamental assumptions, modern historians and theoreticians of the Enlightenment have commonly defined it in similar critical terms, namely as an intellectual movement that aimed toward the eventual emancipation of both the self and society from all foundational myths. Some postmodernists and other antagonists of the Enlightenment have recently described that predicament of post-mythic society as a fulfillment of the “Enlightenment Project;” and a whole discussion has ensued as to whether such a “project” had indeed ever existed, and if so whether it had failed, had been fulfilled, or was yet to be completed.<sup>7</sup> Whereas liberal philosophers from Cassirer to Jürgen Habermas have largely valorized that project, more radical thinkers, from both the left and the right—e.g., respectively, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, or Alasdair MacIntyre—have criticized that antimythic ideology as “mythic” in itself.<sup>8</sup> But these and many other scholars have failed to account for

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Mali, “The Myth of the State Revisited: Ernst Cassirer and Modern Political Theory,” in *The Symbolic Construction of Reality: The Legacy of Ernst Cassirer* (ed. J. A. Barash; Chicago, 2008), 135–62.

<sup>7</sup> For a polemical discussion that all but destroys the historical validity of that category, see James Schmidt, “What Enlightenment Project?” *Political Theory* 28 (2000): 734–57.

<sup>8</sup> The secondary literature on this subject is vast. For some pertinent discussions see Keith Baker and Peter H. Reill (eds.), *What’s Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question* (Stanford, 2001); Norman Geras and Robert Wokler (eds.), *The Enlightenment and Modernity* (New York, 2000). For a comprehensive anthology of descriptions and interpretations of the Enlightenment see Darrin M. McMahon and Ryan P. Hanley (eds.), *The Enlightenment* (5 vols., New York, 2010).

those men of the Enlightenment who did not share its liberal conviction about the irrationality of myth, thinkers like Vico and Herder who did not seek to liberate man and society from their “immature” prejudices and practices, and thus emerged as the most radical polemicists against the radical Enlightenment. Who were they? How may we account for their odd stance and their conception of Enlightenment? What kind of Enlightenment was it, if any, that preferred myth to reason? In what way, if any, could these intellectuals accommodate both the mythical and the critical modes of thought?

These questions were answered only in the twentieth century, more precisely in 1973, in an essay by the philosopher and historian of ideas, Isaiah Berlin. The essay had a deceptively simple title: “The Counter-Enlightenment.”<sup>9</sup> Under this rubric Berlin brought together a rather heterogeneous group of thinkers from different countries—among them the Neapolitan Giambattista Vico; Justus Möser, Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, and other Romantic *Denker* and *Dichter* from various German regions; the Swiss Johann Jakob Bodmer and Johann Jakob Breitinger; Joseph de Maistre from the Duchy of Savoy; the Scottish David Hume, the Irish Edmund Burke, and the English William Blake—all of them, and others, being, on Berlin’s reading, unconventional opponents of the Enlightenment, and as such virtual members of the “Counter-Enlightenment.” But what exactly was that movement, if it ever existed, and what was its ideology? Did any of its putative makers, or other thinkers, ever consider themselves to be such? Or is it just another case of what Eric Hobsbawm has diagnosed as the “invention of tradition”?<sup>10</sup> Hobsbawm’s ingenious catchphrase seems particularly apt in this case, as the very notion of “Counter-Enlightenment” consists in the affirmation of tradition, be it historical or mythical, against all critical opposition, and is thus conducive to the invention of tradition. If so, who invented the Counter-Enlightenment? And if, as seems likely, it was indeed Isaiah Berlin, what were the ideological motivations behind this apparent invention?

As far as Berlin was concerned, he did not pay much attention to this question. In his conversations with the Iranian intellectual Ramin

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “The Counter-Enlightenment,” in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (ed. P. P. Wiener; New York, 1973), 2:110–12; repr. in idem, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (ed. H. Hardy; Oxford, 1981), 1–24.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition* (ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger; Cambridge, 1983), 1–14.

Jahanbegloo, he says that someone, somewhere, must have coined the term “Counter-Enlightenment,” but he had no idea who that was. “Could it be myself?” he wondered playfully. “I should be somewhat surprised. Perhaps I did. I really have no idea.”<sup>11</sup> Be that as it may, even if the term predates his article, Berlin is undeniably the scholar who recognized the intellectual originality and singularity of that movement in the age of Enlightenment, and then did much to propagate its legacy. He elaborated the observations presented in his original essay in a series of essays and books on some of the prominent thinkers of the school. He also wrote more theoretical essays in which he celebrated the potential contribution of the Counter-Enlightenment to the conceptual elucidation of such modern philosophical ideologies as pluralism and nationalism.

Some historians have questioned the validity of the term Counter-Enlightenment, arguing that apart from the fact that no contemporary thinkers ever used the term, there had never been an actual intellectual movement that set out to counter the Enlightenment in the manner described by Berlin.<sup>12</sup> Yet this argument about anachronistic fallacies is equally applicable to the “Enlightenment”—which, as a definitive historical term, was itself unknown in English until the late nineteenth century. In fact, it did not become a common term until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> As John Pocock has put it:

The word “Enlightenment,” with or without the article, is more “our” coinage than it was “theirs”; “we” being historians, philosophers and critics, and “they” being actors in the history to which we refer. As we explore the writings of the eighteenth century, we do not find them using the term “The Enlightenment,” and seldom even enlightenment as a noun.<sup>14</sup>

The same is true also of the names of cultural periods such as the Renaissance or Baroque, which acquired their concrete historical meaning only in the second half of the nineteenth century. In reference to these

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<sup>11</sup> Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: Recollections of an Historian of Ideas* (London, 1992), 69–70.

<sup>12</sup> Robert E. Norton, “The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68 (2007): 635–58. See also Steven Lestition’s persuasive response to these charges: “Countering, Transposing, or Negating the Enlightenment? A Response to Robert Norton,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68 (2007): 659–81; with Norton’s rejoinder “‘Expressionism’ or, ‘Ha! Du bist das Blökende!’” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69 (2008): 339–47.

<sup>13</sup> James Schmidt, “Inventing the Enlightenment: Anti-Jacobins, British Hegelians, and the Oxford English Dictionary,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64 (2003): 421–43.

<sup>14</sup> John G. A. Pocock, “The Re-Description of Enlightenment,” in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 125 (2006): 104.

eras, the people actively involved in the actual making of a new stage or a whole new age in European cultural history were largely unaware of what they had actually achieved. It was thus left for future historians like Jacob Burckhardt and Heinrich Wölfflin—the modern inventors of the Renaissance and the Baroque—to realize, retrospectively, that what had transpired in each of those ages was not merely a novel and important style in art but a whole new way of life, a radical and more total cultural innovation that deserved to be distinguished by a new periodic category. This is precisely what Berlin did in coining the term Counter-Enlightenment: he recognized a singular phenomenon in the intellectual history of the eighteenth century, whose importance went unrecognized by contemporaries—either because it was on the margins of the larger Enlightenment movement or because its true significance would not be fully comprehended until later centuries, when intellectual opposition to the Enlightenment became relevant and perhaps even fashionable, as was the case in the early 1970s. Either way, in the decades since the publication of Berlin's essay, historians and cultural theoreticians have devoted much attention to the Counter-Enlightenment, often with reference to Berlin's original observations.<sup>15</sup> These observations, therefore, merit further elucidation.

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By the time Isaiah Berlin published his essay on the Counter-Enlightenment, he had already secured his position as one of the most prominent intellectuals of the Western world and beyond, known primarily as a political philosopher who, in the age of the Cold War, was a staunch defender of Western Liberalism. Along with fellow “Cold War Liberals” like Karl Popper, Friedrich von Hayek, Raymond Aron, and others, he vigorously opposed the apologists for Soviet Communism as well as many socialists and wayward leftists who were oblivious to the totalitarian nature of that regime.

Already in his early intellectual biography of Marx, *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* (1939), and in a series of essays published during the

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<sup>15</sup> For a general discussion see Graeme Garrard, *Counter-Enlightenments: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (London, 2006). On Berlin's theoretical conception and historical case studies see Joseph Mali and Robert Wokler (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment* (Philadelphia, 2003).



1950s, Berlin had elaborated upon his assumption that the Original Sin of Marxism, and consequently of Soviet Communism, lay in its “monism.” Berlin used this generic term to define all those ethical and political doctrines that sought to reduce the moral and cultural plurality of human life to some ultimate unity or verity, be they the “true religion” of the Catholic dogmatists or the Protestant fundamentalists; the “correct reason” of the French rationalists; the “natural laws” of the British empiricists; the “innermost Volksgeist” of the German romanticists; the “final solution” of the fascists; or the “final revolution” of the communists; and so on. Common to all these doctrines is the assumption that their respective truths are self-evident and would be acceptable to all people if they could only overcome the false notions or conditions which distort their perceptions of reality. In Berlin’s view, that same ancient philosophical “monism” was the distant origin of modern political totalitarianism. As he would ultimately put it in his most famous and influential lecture on “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958):

One belief, more than any other, is responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals—justice or progress or happiness of future generations, or the sacred mission or emancipation of a nation or race or class, or even liberty itself, which demands the sacrifice of individuals for the freedom of society. This is the belief that somewhere, in the past or in the future, in divine revelation or in the mind of an individual thinker, in the pronouncements of history or science, or in the simple heart of an uncorrupted good man, there is a final solution.<sup>16</sup>

Having thus identified monism as the ultimate source of the worst atrocity of the twentieth century, Berlin subsequently turned his attention to a more systematic study of the intellectual origins and transformations of that “perennial philosophy” in modern history. In his many essays on thinkers such as Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Vico, Herder, Hamann, de Maistre, and Sorel, as well as in his public lectures and books on German Romanticism, he sought to examine some of these origins, yet made clear that, as much as he admired the antimonistic expressions of these writers, he objected to their fundamental conservative ideology. It is in view of this background that Berlin’s essay, ostensibly favoring the reactionary ideology of the Counter-Enlightenment, seemed perplexing. Many scholars wondered how it could be possible for such a liberal thinker

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<sup>16</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958), repr. in idem, *Four Essays on Liberty*, (Oxford, 1969), 167.



to turn his back on the ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment. What possible connection could he, a secular and ultramodern intellectual, have with a reactionary movement of the enemies of progress? Why bother explicating the views of thinkers such as Hamann and Herder, let alone de Maistre, who—even if they were dreamers more than doers—had had a profound influence on the aesthetic, ethical, and political doctrines of racists, nationalists, fascists and other such reactionaries in the twentieth century?

Some scholars accused Berlin of excessive admiration for the reactionary ideology he was exploring and of perhaps even unconsciously submitting to it.<sup>17</sup> Berlin clarified his position as follows:

Fundamentally, I am a liberal rationalist. The values of the Enlightenment, what people like Voltaire, Helvétius, Holbach, Condorcet preached, are deeply sympathetic to me. Maybe they were too narrow, and often wrong about the facts of human experience, but these people were great liberators. They liberated people from horrors, obscurantism, fanaticism, monstrous views. They were against cruelty, they were against oppression, they fought the good fight against superstition and ignorance and against a great many things which ruined people's lives. So I am on their side. But they were dogmatic and too simplistic. I am interested in the views of the opposition because I think that understanding it can sharpen one's own vision; clever and gifted enemies often pinpoint fallacies or shallow analyses in the thought of the Enlightenment. I am more interested in critical attacks which lead to knowledge than simply in repeating and defending the commonplaces of and about the Enlightenment.<sup>18</sup>

According to Berlin, the chief flaw in the Enlightenment's worldview, to which its "clever and gifted enemies" drew attention, was a peculiar monistic fallacy that he termed "scientism." By that he meant the assumption that, as in the natural sciences, all real questions have only one single answer; that these answers may all be found either by logical or empirical procedures, or by other methods of scientific inquiry; and that all these answers are mutually compatible, with no one answer contradicting another. This notion, which originated in the ancient doctrine of natural law, led the *philosophes* to conclude that as man is also part of the natural world, his nature and culture must be studied in a similar way. Moreover, while human culture may change and vary, human nature must be the

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<sup>17</sup> Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* (trans. D. Maisel; New Haven, 2010), 372–421.

<sup>18</sup> Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, 70.

same at all times and in all places; so that it is possible, at least in theory, to discover both the true purposes of human life and the effective methods to their realization, such that these may be applicable to all people. These premises would thus enable the planning and building of the perfect society.

As noted above, already during his work on the intellectual environment in which Karl Marx lived and carved out his deterministic ideology, Berlin had investigated the predecessors of the German thinker among the French *philosophes* of the eighteenth century; he had realized “that Marx’s dogmatism, and that of his followers, in part derived from the certainties of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.” This is especially clear in relation to the ideas of radical Enlightenment thinkers such as Helvétius and Holbach, or Turgot and his fellow physiocrats, who were certain that the methods of the natural sciences, which were proving so successful in deciphering the mysteries of the physical world, would also solve, if rightly applied, all the problems in the human world. Even such antagonists to the progressive ideology of the Enlightenment as Rousseau, who did not believe in scientific methodology, shared the more essential monistic belief of his fellow Encyclopedists: i.e., that it was possible, in principle, to discover the “eternal truths” of human life and history through observation of some simple necessities and utilities by which all men abide. In Berlin’s summary:

What they all agreed about, as did their successors after the French Revolution, who may have supposed the truth more difficult to obtain than their naïve and optimistic predecessors, was that the laws of historical development could be—and by then had been—discovered, that the answers to the question of how to live and what to do—morality, social life, political organization, personal relationships—are all capable of being organized in the light of the truths discovered by the correct methods, whatever they are.<sup>19</sup>

Berlin thus concludes that inasmuch as the evils of modern totalitarianism derive from this ancient monism, the opponents of the Enlightenment are worthy of serious consideration and due recognition.

Berlin’s perception of the Enlightenment is problematic and rather anachronistic: in fact, to use his own terminology, it is quite “monistic.” It seems that in dealing with the Enlightenment, Berlin was plagued by the same original and most seminal sin that he attached to it. In his writings

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<sup>19</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “My Intellectual Path,” in *The Power of Ideas* (ed. H. Hardy; London, 2000), 4, 6.

he tended to see all Enlightenment thinkers as birds of a feather, in the very sweeping and extreme terms which were common during the Cold War among critical philosophers such as Adorno and Horkheimer, or intellectual historians like Lester Crocker or Jacob Talmon, but which are no longer adequate.<sup>20</sup> Today, scholars of the Enlightenment find that Voltaire and Montesquieu, Diderot and Lessing, Bougainville and Raynal, and even Captain Cook—the man most reviled by the postcolonialists—were far more open and tolerant of other civilizations and cultures than has been claimed by current antagonists of the Enlightenment.<sup>21</sup> Enlightenment thinkers did indeed write many theoretical works on “human nature,” in which they delineated the traits common to all people. In this respect they may be considered as “universalists.” Yet it is important to bear in mind, that at the same time and in the very same works, they devoted detailed discussions to the concrete examples of the Indians in America, the Chinese, the black natives in Africa, or the Hottentots. In this respect they could be appraised, on Berlin’s assumptions, as proto-“pluralists.”

Berlin was aware of such studies and arguments, and even when he criticized the thinkers of the Enlightenment for their apparent monism, he did not attribute to them direct responsibility for the cultural imperialism and political totalitarianism of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, he insisted that their adherence to Newtonian science and method, which had proven extremely effective in discovering the laws of the natural universe, prompted them to seek similar rules to apply to humanity. Obviously, these thinkers were aware of and even admired the various types of societies and cultures in the human world, but they believed in the existence of an overriding, constant mechanism for the development of man, society, and history that forces all of humanity to progress in one particular proven and necessary way, which they called “civilization.” This led Berlin to the conclusion that the most significant opponents of the Enlightenment were those who objected not only to its ideology, but also and primarily to its scientific methodology; or, more precisely, to the

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<sup>20</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Amsterdam, 1947), 5–57, 100–143; Lester G. Crocker, *An Age of Crisis: Man and the World in Eighteenth-Century French Thought* (Baltimore, 1959); Jacob Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London, 1952).

<sup>21</sup> Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1995), 63–79. On the studies and attitudes of the Enlightenment towards non-European cultures, see Peter J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: Perceptions of the New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), and Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni (eds.), *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, 2007).

application of this methodology to the world of human nature, rather than the natural world alone. As Berlin would have it, then, the Counter-Enlightenment emerged out of that opposition to the particular monistic—or scientific—philosophy of the Enlightenment.

The trailblazers of this opposition were first and foremost Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). Already in Vico's first book, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians* (1710), he had formulated the epistemological principle of *verum esse ipsum factum*; namely, that we can truly know only what we (or other people like us) have made or done. Vico may not have been the first thinker who thought in that way, but, according to Berlin:

Vico transformed this notion and gave it immensely greater scope and depth (and increased its dangerously speculative character) by extending it to the growth in time of the collective or social consciousness of mankind, particularly at its pre-rational and semi-conscious level, to the dreams and myths and images that have dominated man's thoughts and feelings from his earliest beginnings.<sup>22</sup>

In his last and major work, *The New Science* (1725–1744), Vico summed up his entire theory in one famous oration:

But in the night of thick darkness enveloping the earliest antiquity, so remote from ourselves, there shines the eternal and never failing light of a truth beyond all question: that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind. Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, He alone knows; and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations, or civil world, which, since men had made it, men could come to know.<sup>23</sup>

These resounding sentences epitomize the whole philosophy of the Counter-Enlightenment, as perceived by Berlin. In his *New Science*, Vico sought to turn the common knowledge, or mere *coscienza*, which we get from our subjective human experience, into a new scientific knowledge, literally a *scienza nuova*, by a new hermeneutic methodology that proved much more adequate to the specific humanistic interests and subjects of historians. Similarly, Berlin viewed Herder as the precursor of the modern

<sup>22</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (London, 1976), 26.

<sup>23</sup> Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* (trans. and ed. T. G. Bergin and M. H. Fisch; Ithaca, 1968), par. 331.

hermeneutic idea of *Einfühlung*, or the ability to get into the feelings and thoughts of other people by the psychological means of empathy and self-introspection; this idea bred the whole German tradition of *Geisteswissenschaften*, and is still vital to certain interpretive schools in the modern humanities and social sciences.<sup>24</sup>

The “anthropological” theories of Vico and Herder, and more generally their fascination with all “mythic” traditions, render them, however inadvertently, early promoters of Berlin’s own pluralism. Berlin repeatedly makes clear that, for all their apparent fallacies, these thinkers felt and understood human reality as intrinsically pluralistic. They recognized that there are no absolute standards, universal scientific theories, objective tests, ultimate proofs, or final solutions—nor can there be—for how to choose among human values and moral perceptions, lifestyles, beliefs, and various cultures: every human society shapes its concepts and practices in accordance with its own unique environment and history. In Berlin’s writings, even a misanthropic reactionary like Joseph de Maistre figures as some sort of a pluralist, even if only *malgré lui*, because out of his animosity to all the liberal notions and innovations of the French Revolution he also elucidated some genuine arguments against its creeds of rationalism, universalism, utopianism, and other monistic paradigms.<sup>25</sup> Berlin well knew, of course, that these wayward thinkers were not really or fully pluralists by our modern standards, and most of them would not have recognized themselves as such. But he thought that, inasmuch as they all opposed the monistic ideologies of the Enlightenment, they were important figures in the dialectical shaping of the opposing tradition.

That was the singular most important achievement of the Counter-Enlightenment. Berlin celebrated it in *Vico and Herder* (1976), and it was that publication that set off the whole discussion on the political meaning of the Counter-Enlightenment for our postmodern age. This was especially the case because, although Berlin had elaborated the fundamental assumptions of his liberal political philosophy and his theory of the human sciences in some of his early philosophical essays, as well as his more historical essays of the early 1950s, it was only in the late 1970s, following the publication of *Vico and Herder*, that his ideas on the subject came to attract widespread public attention. Clearly, many of his readers

<sup>24</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “The Counter-Enlightenment,” 10–12; see also Berlin’s comprehensive essay “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *Vico and Herder*, 143–216.

<sup>25</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism,” in idem, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (ed. H. Hardy; London, 1990), 91–174.

were young people who felt that the idea of Counter-Enlightenment perfectly expressed their disappointment with the revolutionary radicalism of the 1960s and the modern era in general. By the late 1970s, opposition to the liberal ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment had become fashionable among adherents of the new liberal theories of “pluralism,” “multiculturalism,” and “communitarianism,” but also—against Berlin’s deepest convictions—among those who had always opposed the Enlightenment and now associated it with the dangerous theories of “relativism,” “cultural pessimism,” and “nihilism.”

In order to understand how and why the philosophical-historical notion of Counter-Enlightenment acquired such divergent political interpretations and implications it is necessary to reassess its invention and reception in the specific conditions that prevailed in the early 1970s. It may then be possible to see whether that notion might still be sustainable as a useful category in modern historiography of the Enlightenment and its opponents.

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Although Berlin did not directly address current events, the year in which his original essay on the Counter-Enlightenment appeared—1973—marks a turning point in the history of the twentieth century. As Eric Hobsbawm has shown in his monumental *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991*, that year set in motion the “tectonic cracks and shifts” that would ultimately destroy the old order of the Cold War.<sup>26</sup> The main causes of the epochal change were economic, but the crisis that ensued was much deeper and pertained to the very cores of the major ideologies that had ruled the world for three decades. For the recession that set in not only wiped out the social achievements of the welfare states in both the capitalist and communist systems, but also exposed the fundamental fallacies of both ideologies in ways that left their adherents utterly disillusioned. Having thus lost all confidence and sense of direction in pursuing their respective destinies, they turned to alternative ideologies, many of which betrayed, under fashionable “neo-,” “counter-,” and “post-” labels, the pervasive skepticism, revisionism, and conservatism of the age. It is no coincidence that, shortly after the invention of the term Counter-

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<sup>26</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (New York, 1995), 403–32.

Enlightenment, two other, similar terms were introduced. In 1978, Jean-François Lyotard coined the term “postmodernism” in order to expose the latent disciplinarian and totalitarian implications in all modern theories of progressive history, like those of liberalism and communism;<sup>27</sup> similarly, in 1981, Alasdair MacIntyre coined the expression the “Enlightenment Project,” in order to expose the vacuity of the Enlightenment itself.<sup>28</sup> In the postmodern atmosphere of the late twentieth century, criticism of the Enlightenment intensified on both Left and Right. Under the combined attack by the Frankfurt School, Michel Foucault, and Edward Said on the one hand, and anti-utopian revisionists such as John Gray on the other, the Enlightenment has come to be considered a culprit, blamed for all the crimes of modern society and Western culture—imperialism, fascism, totalitarianism, instrumentalism, Orientalism, utopianism, to name but a few. Even today’s foremost advocate for the Enlightenment, Jürgen Habermas, couched his defense of it in apologetic terms, arguing that its “project” has not failed, but is simply as yet “unfinished.”<sup>29</sup>

It is against this intellectual backdrop that the term Counter-Enlightenment has gained its current meanings and connotations, which vary widely depending on the ideological position of those who employ it. Curiously, the term has been used primarily, and very pejoratively, by defenders of the Enlightenment, as well as by political polemicists who commonly seize upon it and utilize it to denounce Neo-Conservative ideologues; whereas modern opponents of the Enlightenment have hardly employed it.<sup>30</sup> In any case, with so many different appropriations of the term, it has become well-nigh impossible to isolate the historical term “Counter-Enlightenment” from its newer, additional, political meanings. Like other concepts defined as “essentially contested” by theorists in the social sciences, the term has become problematic because it no longer has a single, historically clear and established meaning. In this particular case, the fate of the “Counter-Enlightenment” is similar and eminently

<sup>27</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris, 1978).

<sup>28</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London, 1981).

<sup>29</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (trans. F. Lawrence; Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 3–22.

<sup>30</sup> For some critical discussions of the notion and various manifestations of the Counter-Enlightenment, on both historical and philosophical-political grounds, see Stephen Holmes, *The Anatomy of Anti-Liberalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); Raymond Tallis, *Enemies of Hope: A Critique of Contemporary Pessimism, Irrationalism, Anti-Humanism, and the Counter-Enlightenment* (New York, 1997); Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven, 2004).



tied to that of its twin, "Enlightenment," which has likewise become synonymous with "Western civilization," with all the attendant uneasiness that this inspires. As Robert Darnton points out, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment

has been blown up to such a size that it would not be recognized by the men who first created it. Having been floated at first with a few *bons mots* in some Parisian salons, it became a campaign to crush *l'infâme*, a march of progress, a spirit of the age, a secular faith, a world view to be defended or combated or transcended, and the source of everything good, bad, and modern, including liberalism, capitalism, imperialism, male chauvinism, world federalism, UNESCO, humanism, and the Family of Man. Whoever has a bone to pick or a cause to defend begins with the Enlightenment.<sup>31</sup>

Darnton proposes a simple and effective solution to this inflation of connotations: deflation, limiting the range of possible meanings of the word to what the Enlightenment actually was in the world. Accordingly, he redefines the Enlightenment as a movement of prominent men of letters who—in one particular period, the years between the death of Louis XIV (1715) and the French Revolution (1789), and in one particular arena, the city of Paris—launched a campaign to reform views and institutions. Although Darnton has not conducted any research on the Counter-Enlightenment and, to the best of my knowledge, never even uses the term, he writes extensively about class-based opposition to institutional Enlightenment, dealing with those marginal writers who neither achieved success nor belonged to the *salon* circle, and whose antagonism to the *philosophes* arose from personal frustrations, not intellectual considerations.<sup>32</sup> Following Darnton's guidelines, Darrin McMahon revised Berlin's all-inclusive philosophical definition of the Counter-Enlightenment according to much stricter historical parameters, confining it to a country (France), a time (pre-revolution), and a class (marginal writers).<sup>33</sup> Yet inasmuch as McMahon already insinuated in the title of his book that these "Enemies of the Enlightenment" were fundamental to the "Making of Modernity," he opened up the rather narrow historical domain of his study to further historical investigations and wider ideological implications.

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Darnton, *George Washington's False Teeth: An Unconventional Guide to the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 2003), 3.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982).

<sup>33</sup> Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford, 2001).



Following upon McMahon's study, Jonathan Israel seems to concur with McMahon's categorical definition of the Counter-Enlightenment, yet he then seeks to impose it upon a much wider circle of reactionaries in many other countries.<sup>34</sup> He regards the "Counter-Enlightenment" as the third party in the intellectual battle of the age, the party of inhumanity, as it were, that opposed both the "radical" and the "moderate" parties.<sup>35</sup> Alas, while Israel has already devoted two monumental volumes to the battle of these two other parties, he has largely neglected the Counter-Enlightenment; moreover, he seems to have co-opted its main spokesmen to either one of the two main parties.<sup>36</sup> On these premises, the real agents of the Counter-Enlightenment would seem to have been those reactionaries who championed the traditional values of orthodox religion and the monarchy—men like de Maistre, say, but not Burke—in short, only those extremists who were ideological enemies of reason, liberty, and modernity. As such they differed from the conservative thinkers who belonged to the "moderate Enlightenment," the likes of Hume, Voltaire, or Kant, who shared with the more radical thinkers of the century certain basic ethical and political principles of enlightenment. On these assumptions, the party of the Counter-Enlightenment might not even be considered a participant in the intellectual battle within the Enlightenment; thence, perhaps, comes its virtual omission from Israel's voluminous history.

A proper historical—as against philosophical or ideological—definition of the Counter-Enlightenment is therefore yet to be drafted. All the more so because, as John Pocock has recently argued, some basic categories in this discussion are still not clear. In his critical reflections on Berlin's "The Counter-Enlightenment," he points out that even though the notion itself is more of an ideal philosophical construction than a historical reality, this invention, if so it is, nevertheless poses some pertinent questions to all scholars dealing with the Enlightenment and its opponents:

Are we to understand that one species of Enlightenment had risen to counter another, as the Catholic Counter-Reformation claimed to be a true reformation countering a false? Is it the case that what we know as

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<sup>34</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670–1752* (Oxford, 2006), 38–40.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton, 2009), 34–37. See also Israel's "Enlightenment! Which Enlightenment?" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67 (2006): 523–45 (review of Alan Kors et al. [eds.], *The Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* [New York, 2003]).

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, the classification of Vico as a would-be radical thinker in Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 528–37.

Enlightenment contained tensions and contrary tendencies, so that Enlightenments and Counter-Enlightenments might occur within it? Or have we to do with intellects that had identified something called Enlightenment in terms much the same as those in which we identify it ourselves, and had set out to overthrow it in ways that might be called Anti-Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment in the same breath?<sup>37</sup>

Before we proceed to answer these questions, it seems to me that it would be useful to adopt Darnton's methodological suggestion in order to forge a narrower definition of the Counter-Enlightenment, thereby facilitating a more methodical discussion of the Enlightenment and its opponents. What, then, was the Counter-Enlightenment?

First, the few scholars who comprised the Counter-Enlightenment did not really create a unified movement, not even in the form of an intellectual movement like that of the Enlightenment. They were, on the whole, individual thinkers, separate from one another in space and in time; and they were furthermore destined to remain rather marginal both in terms of their provincial origins and lives (in such places as Naples, Osnabrück, Königsberg, Weimar, Zurich, and Edinburgh), and in terms of their intellectual status in the "Republic of Letters" of the eighteenth century.

Second, and in spite of their marginality, these scholars were, by virtue of their academic education and self-perception, equally learned and similarly engaged with the proponents of the Enlightenment in its intellectual preoccupations: they were members of the same *salons*, literary clubs, coffeehouses, and special academies, where literary life thrived even in provincial towns and regions; they took part in debates and competitions held under the auspices of various academies; they published essays and books on current events. They were distinguished from their rivals not by their social positions but by their opinions. Their religious convictions are what made them unique, a point insufficiently emphasized by Berlin: some were devout believers (Hamann, Vico), while others (Herder, Burke) believed more in religion as a necessary social institution than in a particular religion. Yet without exception, they all believed in divine Providence, be it transcendent or immanent, as that which ensures that human life, social institutions, and the historical process will continue to operate smoothly and purposefully.

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<sup>37</sup> Pocock, "The Re-Description of Enlightenment," 103. See also, in the same vein, Sylviane Alberta-Coppola's entry on "Counter-Enlightenment," in Kors et al., *The Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, 1:307–11.

Third, Berlin's classification of Counter-Enlightenment thinkers included outright reactionaries (such as de Maistre), along with other thinkers (Schiller) who had developed their critical views of the Enlightenment under the impressions of the reign of terror of the French Revolution and in reaction to it—as well as Romantic nationalists who responded to even later events (such as Napoleon's conquests and the Industrial Revolution). In contrast, the timeframe for the Counter-Enlightenment ought to be confined to that of the Enlightenment itself; that is, *until* the French Revolution.<sup>38</sup>

Fourth, *pace* McMahon and other scholars who did not distinguish between moderate Counter-Enlightenment thinkers like Vico and Herder and the more zealous enemies of the Enlightenment, it would be useful to explore the dialectic connotations of “counter-,” which is not identical to the more inflexibly oppositional term, “anti-.” For “counter-” connotes a gentler opposition to the object under consideration; or, to use the definitive term by which we define the Enlightenment, a different mode of criticism: the critical connotations of the Counter-Enlightenment align it with, say, art criticism, where the aim is not to eliminate the artwork, but rather to illuminate it from new perspectives so as to savor it. Applying this framework to the case under consideration, men like Vico, Herder, or Hamann might be seen as thinkers who criticized the Enlightenment in order to cure it from certain maladies (rationalism, cosmopolitanism, secularism, etc.).<sup>39</sup> As Charles Taylor suggests, we must come to see the Counter-Enlightenment as an immanent aspect of the Enlightenment itself, a natural and integral reaction to its process of rational maturation, which, inasmuch as it opened and called up more archaic sources of experience, was essential to its reinvigoration and continuation.<sup>40</sup> What is required, then, is a dialectical, not antithetical, conception of these two orientations within the Enlightenment, such as would show how they

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<sup>38</sup> On the problematic connections between the intellectual and the actual phases in the history of radical political movements in the eighteenth century see John G. A. Pocock, “Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, Revolution and Counter-Revolution: A Euro-sceptical Enquiry,” *History of Political Thought* 20 (1999): 125–39.

<sup>39</sup> For such interpretations, contra Berlin, of Vico, Herder, and Hamann as participants in the Enlightenment, see, respectively, John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680–1760* (Cambridge, 2005), 201–55; Frederick Beiser, “Berlin and the German Counter-Enlightenment,” in Mali and Wokler, *Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment*, 105–16; John R. Betz, *After Enlightenment: The Post-Secular Vision of J. G. Hamann* (Oxford, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Immanent Counter-Enlightenment,” in *Canadian Political Philosophy: Contemporary Reflections* (ed. R. Beiner and W. Norman; Oxford, 2001), 386–400.

shared and pursued certain common ideas and ideals concerning the amelioration of the human condition, yet held different essential assumptions concerning human life and history. Whereas the thinkers of the Enlightenment assumed that all men were naturalistic and egotistic but ultimately rationalistic, and thus sought to edify society by an ever more reasonable conception and organization, Vico and likeminded thinkers of the Counter-Enlightenment believed that all men were “sociable” yet “weak and fallen,”<sup>41</sup> more imaginative than cognitive in their functioning; thus, they sought rather to solidify the mythopoeic traditions by which human communities are founded and sustained.

Finally, back on historical grounds, and bearing in mind the older and bolder conception of the Enlightenment as a radical movement, it is important to distinguish among various tendencies within the Enlightenment itself. As Margaret Jacob, Jonathan Israel, and others have shown, there were at least two main ideological orientations in that movement—the “radical” Enlightenment (Bayle, Toland, Giannone, Diderot, Holbach, Lamettrie, Helvétius, Priestley) and the more “moderate” Enlightenment (Locke, Newton, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Hume, Smith, Lessing, Kant). On the whole, the makers of the Counter-Enlightenment arose in reaction to the radical Enlightenment, and were particularly incensed by the libertarian—or, as they preferred to call them, Epicurean—doctrines of the French Enlightenment, fearing, quite rightly, that these ancient pagan doctrines were more dangerous to the Christian European tradition than the modern natural sciences. They thus set out to rebut the modern Epicureans as vigorously as they could, albeit by new scientific theories, as befitting the new times and tides. From this standpoint, Berlin’s contention that the main struggle between the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment was more methodological than ideological, and was essentially over the excessive monistic “scientism” of the Enlightenment, must be revised.

As already hinted at above, the Counter-Enlightenment’s struggle against the Enlightenment was entirely different, on both theoretical and practical grounds, from the all-out war waged against it by its enemies from within the *ancien régime*. The Counter-Enlightenment’s opposition was purely intellectual, and was not meant to annihilate the Enlightenment—which was the ultimate goal of the supporters of the absolute monarchy and the Catholic Church in France in their battle against the

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<sup>41</sup> Vico, *The New Science*, pars. 2, 129.

*Encyclopédie*. Instead, the Counter-Enlightenment aimed to reveal and correct the flaws of the Enlightenment and to point the movement in an alternative, and on the whole retroactive, direction. Although this struggle was often waged over concrete issues that varied from country to country—be they modes of “censorship” or “worship” in France, or the more philosophical “limits of Enlightenment” in Prussia under Friedrich II—the issues that really mattered to the proponents of the Counter-Enlightenment were more long-term, and pertained to deeper problems of human life and history. Ultimately, their struggle was about myth. For thinkers like Vico, Herder, Hamann, and their fellow travelers rightly saw that the modern fashions of rationalism, materialism, empiricism, mechanism—in short, secularism—were undermining the mythic foundations of their own systems of belief. And they feared that without those foundations the whole structure of civilization might collapse. Vico summed it all up in two words when he redefined myth as the “true narration” (*vera narratio*) of all historical communities. Vico described this particular discovery as the “master key” of his science—*la chiave maestra di questa scienza*—and I think it might also be used to unlock the problem of the Counter-Enlightenment.<sup>42</sup>

I trust that a reassessment of the Counter-Enlightenment by these measures—namely, as an intellectual movement that counters the essential assumption of the Enlightenment, as defined above, by the reaffirmation of myth—is simpler and more adequate than Berlin’s proposal, because not all champions of the Enlightenment were monists (e.g., Montesquieu), nor were all its opponents (e.g., Hamann) pluralists.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, all the champions of the Enlightenment from Descartes to Kant denounced myth as a false perception of reality, a mere fiction that was not only outrageous but dangerous to those who believed it. As Descartes phrased it in his *Discourse on Method*—in many ways the foundational text of the whole European Enlightenment:

Then, too, the mythical stories represent, as having happened, many things which are in no wise possible. Even the most trustworthy of the histories, if they do not change or exaggerate the import of things, in order to make them seem more worthy of perusal, at least omit almost all the more commonplace and less striking of the background circumstances, and the account they give of them is to that extent misleading. Those who regulate

<sup>42</sup> Vico, *The New Science*, par. 34.

<sup>43</sup> For criticism of Berlin on this issue, see Mark Lilla, *G. B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 1–6.

their conduct by examples drawn from these sources are all too likely to be betrayed into romantic extravagances, forming projects that exceed their powers.<sup>44</sup>

The fact that these stories still exist in the modern age indicates not only that humanity is still mired in the state which Kant would describe as “immaturity” (*Unmündigkeit*), but also makes clear, long before Hobsbawm coined the “invention of tradition” and following a similar line of argumentation, why the eradication of mythology is so difficult—because such stories have always served the rulers to manipulate the true histories of religions, nations, and civilizations. Against that common conviction of the Enlightenment, the thinkers of the Counter-Enlightenment would argue that the ancient myths were essential even—and especially—in the modern age. They continued to work on myth, knowing that inasmuch as people organize their experience and the memory of human events mainly according to stories of past actions and events, myths are indispensable for the narrative construction of personal and communal identities.<sup>45</sup> In so doing they confounded the champions of the Enlightenment. As Hans Blumenberg puts it: “Nothing surprised the promoters of Enlightenment more, and left them standing more incredulously before the failure of what they thought were their ultimate exertions, than the survival of the contemptible old stories—the continuation of work on myth.”<sup>46</sup>

The Counter-Enlightenment thus invented the oxymoronic notion of “modern mythology” that would become so fundamental in the nationalistic theories of the Romanticists and later extremists. As such, this was one of the most catastrophic inventions in modern political theory and history. Yet, as much as Berlin derided that notion, he saw that it drew on certain atavistic sentiments of personal and communal identity that were essential to human life and history, even in modern times. The intellectual history of Europe in the twentieth century demonstrated to Berlin the disastrous effects of ignoring reactionary ideology and its so-called “obsolete” ideas regarding the power of religious faith or a legacy of myth. This had occurred in the case of the Romantic conception of the nation, which was long “neglected” by liberal intellectuals for being mythical, and

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<sup>44</sup> René Descartes, “Discourse on Method,” in idem, *Philosophical Writings* (sel. and trans. N. Kemp Smith; New York, 1958), 97.

<sup>45</sup> I elaborate this theory in my *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (Chicago, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth* (trans. R. M. Wallace; Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 274.

therefore became “ideologically important and dangerous”—all the more so for those who had not taken it seriously.<sup>47</sup>

In the late 1970s, as Berlin set out to elucidate his own theory on the origins of modern nationalism, he thus harkened back to the Counter-Enlightenment’s theories of myth. His deep antipathy to simplistic explanations and final solutions and to all kinds of abstract utopian visions of “perfect society,” which had proliferated in the Enlightenment and ever after, aligned him with Vico, who likewise rejected such visions: “Philosophy considers man as he should be and so can be of service to but very few, those who wish to live in the republic of Plato and not to fall back into the dregs of Romulus.”<sup>48</sup> Likewise, Berlin followed Herder, who not only recognized but prized the “ethnic” qualities of different historical communities, and eventually came to form a theory of “cultural nationalism” that—as Berlin would have it—was compatible with liberalism. One of Berlin’s students would later rechristen this theory with the label “liberal nationalism.”<sup>49</sup> In this way the notion of “modern mythology” has now become an essential—even if controversial—component in many theories and histories of nationalism. Whereas radical theorists like Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, or Eric Hobsbawm and their many followers insist on the modern “invention of the nation,” and would thus dismiss all modern forms of national mythology as ideology, Berlin and many other theorists, above all the so-called “primordialists,” maintain, along with Herder, that mythology is not only inevitable but also valuable in the construction of the modern nation. In Anthony Smith’s words, although “civic” elements

are obviously required to maintain a nation in the modern world with its particular complex of economic and political conditions, ethnic profiles and identities are increasingly sought, if only to stem the tide of rationalisation and disenchantment. It is to their ethnic symbols, values, myths and memories that so many populations turn for inspiration and guidance, not in the everyday, practical business of running a state, but for that sense of fraternity and heroism which will enable them to conduct their affairs successfully.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power” [1979], repr. in idem, *Against the Current*, 333–55.

<sup>48</sup> Vico, *The New Science*, par. 131.

<sup>49</sup> On Berlin’s contribution to the formation of that new theory see the introduction and acknowledgement in Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton, 1993).

<sup>50</sup> Anthony D. Smith, “The Myth of the ‘Modern Nation’ and the Myths of Nations,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 11 (1988): 1–26. Smith elaborates this observation in many theoretical

Such attempts to expose the more archaic psychological motivations and mythical associations of seemingly “new” political-historical traditions, namely the beliefs that preceded and enabled their modern “invention,” may thus divest the very notion of “invention” of its fashionable critical and rather mechanical connotations; this discussion reminds us that any “invention of tradition” is a reactivation of historical recollections that make up and sustain the nation throughout its history. I trust that a reassessment of the “invention” of the Counter-Enlightenment along these lines may render it more acceptable to historians, and thus enhance the case for the defense.

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and historical studies. See, for example, *Chosen Peoples: The Sacred Origins of Nations* (Oxford, 2003).



AFTERWORD:  
THE CHANGING CONTOURS OF EARLY MODERN  
INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

Theodore K. Rabb

When Michael Heyd began his studies for a Ph.D. at Princeton University in 1970, the major questions that absorbed scholars in the field of early modern European intellectual history had been familiar for at least three decades, and in some cases went back more than a century, to the world of Jacob Burckhardt and Leslie Stephen.<sup>1</sup> What had the great literary and philosophical figures of the past thought? How had they interacted, whether as disciples, controversialists, or shapers of subject matter? How had they responded to their times and, in turn, affected their contemporaries or successors? What were the different forms of creativity, especially the written and the artistic, and how did they relate to one another? These and a few adjacent issues formed the principal concerns of the scholarship that had established the subdiscipline.

The one major new interest, and it was to become crucial to anyone entering the field in 1970, was the history of science. From early stirrings in the 1930s, the story of the scientific revolution had begun to capture attention in the years following World War II, and by 1970 was not only an essential object of study for anyone interested in early modern intellectual history, but was also helping to define the chronology of the period.<sup>2</sup> Little could anyone at the time have realized that this was but the first of the transformations that were to overwhelm the field in the next forty years.

The next development came very quickly: Keith Thomas's powerful demonstration that the traditional history of religion, focused on doctrine and the detailed examination of texts, had to be expanded to include what often had been regarded as superstition—belief in witches, in magic, and in a wide range of other-worldly phenomena. Interestingly enough, this

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *Geschichte der Renaissance in Italien* (Stuttgart, 1868); Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1876).

<sup>2</sup> Alexandre Koyré, *Études Galiléennes* (Paris, 1939); Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science, 1300–1800* (London, 1949); Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962); Theodore K. Rabb, "The Scientific Revolution and the Problem of Periodization," *European Review* 15:4 (2007): 503–12.

shift of emphasis connected with one of the newer streams in the history of science, which itself was beginning to move away from the magisterial story of great discoveries into the penumbra of ideas about nature, including speculation about magic and the occult.<sup>3</sup> What both of these reorientations heralded was a change in direction for intellectual history. Alongside the standard explorations of the outlooks of major authors and the literate classes that read their works, there was now growing attention, both to topics such as magic which did not normally appear in this context, and also to the nonliterate people whose beliefs had tended to be excluded from the story.<sup>4</sup> And this quest to understand the attitudes of entire societies was receiving a major stimulus, at this very time, from a new initiative in French scholarship.

The historiography of early modern Europe in France had been dominated for decades by the *Annales* school in Paris. Its commitment had been to social history, and its leading exponents—Fernand Braudel, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, and Pierre Goubert—had been pioneers in what they called “histoire totale”; that is, the effort to comprehend a society in its totality, from the topography of its surroundings to the diet of its peasants. Around 1970, however, there appeared a new interest in the “histoire des mentalités,” the history of the mental world of the past. Two non-*Annales* writers, in particular, were to have a broad influence in bringing new subjects to the fore: Philippe Ariès and Michel Foucault.<sup>5</sup> Their investigations of attitudes toward childhood, death, madness, and discipline widened the boundaries of the field enormously, and helped to create interactions between social and intellectual history that were to benefit both specialties.

It was largely because of French influence, however, that there also arose in these years an interest in forms of analysis that, by and large, diverted scholars from the basic enterprise of intellectual history. What was involved was a cluster of enterprises that took their cue from theoretical premises, rather than from problems inherent in the evidence or

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<sup>3</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London, 1971); Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London, 1964).

<sup>4</sup> The speed with which this changing landscape was recognized is indicated by the appearance, already in 1978, of a wide-ranging survey; see Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (trans. P. M. Ranum; Baltimore, 1974); Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris, 1972).

in historiography. The purpose of these investigations was, above all, to assess the explanatory powers of certain formulations or uses of language, rather than to expand the understanding of the past. The emphasis therefore was often on the way a reader responded to a text, not on the text itself. Whether pursued under the heading of theory, the linguistic turn, structuralism, or postmodernism, these efforts to uncover new ways of understanding the work of writers and artists inspired a considerable literature, but one would be hard put to it to argue that the results have significantly enlarged the essential terrain of intellectual history. It is noteworthy, moreover, that none of the contributions to this volume reflect these approaches to any noticeable degree.

Other widenings of the horizon that, by contrast, have undoubtedly helped to extend the field's reach have included an infusion of ideas from the neighboring discipline of anthropology, and also (though this remains a minor venture) a nod in the direction of music. Two initiatives that have had particularly notable effects should, however, be mentioned in the context of this volume.

The first is a growing appreciation among historians of the importance of the visual arts. Traditionally, the history of art had been a distinct discipline, devoted to style and meaning, with only slight attention (usually associated with an interest in iconography) to the larger setting or the connections between artists and their surroundings. Historians, for their part, have until recently shown scant regard for images as evidence of ideas or beliefs. That divide began to dissolve in the 1970s and 1980s as a series of studies revealed the new insights that were available from a partnership between intellectual historians and historians of art.<sup>6</sup>

The final new impulse that deserves a mention is the growing awareness among Europeanists, during recent decades, that they might profit from looking beyond the confines of their continent, or at least beyond its Christian majority. To some extent this awareness is the result of the process of globalization that has accompanied economic change and the transformation of communications in the late twentieth century; it also reflects a campaign to teach world history in the schools. Where trends within scholarship were concerned, it was probably, in addition, a consequence

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<sup>6</sup> Theodore K. Rabb, "The Historian and the Art Historian," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4 (1973): 107–17; Jonathan Brown and J. H. Elliott, *A Palace for a King: The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip IV* (New Haven, 1980); *Art and History: Images and Their Meaning* (ed. R. I. Rotberg and T. K. Rabb; New York, 1988); first published in the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17:1 (1986).

of the reaction (by no means entirely favorable) to Edward Said's attack on European treatments of non-Western subjects and attempts to minimize the distinctiveness of Western civilization.<sup>7</sup> Whatever the causes, the effect over the years that followed has been a further opening up of topics and methodology, helping to create a ferment of new subjects and approaches that is without precedent in the annals of intellectual history.

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The outcome of these transformations is amply on display in the essays in this volume. It is true that there are close readings, as in days gone by, of some of the luminaries of the period, such as Loyola, Beza, Lipsius, Descartes, Vico, and Rousseau. But these analyses, too, depend on discussions of aspects of the subject—images, for example, or the emotions or the passions—that would have been foreign to intellectual historians half a century ago. Even a participant in the burgeoning new field of studies of the scientific revolution would have been surprised, as late as the 1970s and even the 1980s, that a familiar “Vanitas” painting by Jacques de Gheyn could have a role in elucidating “the search for knowledge of the natural world.”

No less puzzling to such a scholar would have been the effort, apparent in many of the essays, to broach the subject of human feelings. The historians of previous generations found it difficult enough to unravel meanings and clarify thoughts. They showed little sign of wanting to take on, in addition, the problems inherent in the uncovering of emotions, or in the attempt to explain how the passions were defined and regarded. Yet here we find that enterprise serving as an essential means of explicating the ideas of people as varied as the Roman rabbi Jacob Zahalon and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This new focus may be a consequence of the attention that has been given to science, because in dealing with this subject one can find oneself on the border between medicine and history. But its rise as a vital element in current research is testimony to the expansion that has taken place in the definition of intellectual history.

Another area which has seen the development of new approaches is the history of religion. Where once the main task of the historian was to grasp fine points of theology, to show how doctrines developed, or to explain

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978); Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (London, 1987).

confessional differences, now the mandate is much larger. It is significant that the word “superstition” occurs with some regularity in these essays, because the scrutiny applied to the very meaning of faith has shifted what used to be familiar ground. It has become difficult, for example, to accept traditional notions of the boundary between orthodoxy and heresy. Limits on authenticity are no longer acceptable. And contradictions arouse little surprise. A case in point is the discussion of the denunciation by an official Church body, the Council of Trent, of a practice that nevertheless remained common among that Church’s most avid adherents, the Jesuits. Even the Europeans’ interest in the non-Christian world suggests a more open and less restricted understanding of the limits of speculation and belief.

It is in this last area that one encounters what is perhaps the most startling of the transformations of the subject matter of intellectual history. Without ignoring the fact that this volume is the work of Israelis, who obviously have a special affinity for topics that go beyond Christianity, the evidence presented here for the early modern fascination with the “other” is still remarkable. We learn about Christian writers’ explorations of Islam, of paganism, and of the unfamiliar ritual of circumcision. These all had implications for the home culture, but they also served as symptoms of an interest in the ideas and practices of non-Christian cultures that we now see as fundamental to early modern Europe—one of the marks of an age when interactions with a wider world became ever more extensive.

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The shape of intellectual history thus looks very different in 2012 than it did in 1970. And it is a measure of Michael Heyd’s role in the field that these essays by his students and colleagues, like his own works, are such important indicators of the transformations that have taken place. Having started out with a study of Cartesianism in a Calvinist stronghold, Heyd moved on to the passions and to Christian views of Judaism, all subjects addressed in this volume.<sup>8</sup> To these areas, and others, he has brought the

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Heyd, *Between Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment: Jean-Robert Chouet and the Introduction of Cartesian Science in the Academy of Geneva* (Jerusalem-The Hague, 1982); Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable: The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century* (Leiden, 1995); and Heyd, “The Jewish Quaker: Christian Perceptions of Sabbatai Zevi as an Enthusiast,” in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (ed. A. P. Coudert and J. S. Shoulson; Philadelphia, 2004), 234–65. If I may add one personal note, it is to record my pleasure at witnessing the continuity of generations, since these essays include contributions by what might be called

qualities of meticulous scholarship, keen insight, and intense study of the documentary evidence that are also broadly on display in the essays in this volume. Is it not appropriate to consider his oeuvre and his influence as emblems of the reshaping of early modern intellectual history during these past four decades?

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two “grandsons”, namely Moshe Sluhovsky and Zur Shalev, who worked not only with my dissertation advisee, Michael Heyd, but also with me.

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